A PLACE OF PERSONAL AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE: USING BLACK FEMINIST VALUES, PERSPECTIVES, AND EMBODIED KNOWLEDGES TO (RE)EXAMINE INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS AND ETHICS IN DIGITAL RESEARCH

By

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ABSTRACT

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Centering the experiences and practices of Black women scholars who engage research in areas of Black technological and digital engagement, this dissertation examines how Black women and Black feminist-identifying digital researchers' personal, cultural, and professional identities inform methodological and ethical decision-making in their work. Building on the theoretical approaches of Black feminist thinkers like Patricia Hill Collins and the Combahee River Collective, this project addresses the complexities of digital ethics by 1) examining how Black women's unique, lived experience(s) both inform and are impacted by their work and 2) uncovering the processes that support -- and sometimes create tensions with -- research around Black digital publics, users, and spaces. This project places a special focus on the work of Black women and Black feminist-identifying scholars in writing studies-related fields, collecting and analyzing data from multiple qualitative interviews amongst five research participants.

Ultimately, this dissertation highlights the growing work and practices of Black women digital researchers, using Black feminist theory as a means to uncover how Black women researchers reconsider, repurpose, and reapproach their research practices from embodied and critical standpoints. This project also adds to growing conversations around the development of digital methodologies in writing and communication-related fields, particularly those that place a greater priority on researchers' ethical responsibilities to multiple-marginalized technology users and communities.

This dissertation is dedicated to the Black women, the Black queer folks, the Black disabled folks, the Black activists, the Black healers, and all the Black people across the diaspora who occupy digital spaces in ways that continually connect us to our roots, connect us to each other, and near us towards our collective freedom. May we all continue to love and disrupt and build and resist in the best ways we know how.

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Given the social and political climates of the late 2010s and early 2020s, inquiries into the digital experiences and activisms of Black people are on the rise, making room for researchers in academic spaces to study the moments, phenomena, cultures, communities, and conversations that shape and influence modern discourses. In recent years, researchers engaged in research around Black digitality have documented the use of blogging as a means for Black people to engage in social discourse (Duthely 2017; Steele 2018), we have documented the use of video sites like YouTube as a way for Black women to create digital community and co-construct their identities in healthy, culturally-relevant ways (Sawyer 2018), we have witnessed the creation of internet and social media groups as a way for folks to share space and experiences around hurt, trauma, and healing (Rapp et al., 2010), and we have seen the ways in which Black social media users have created hashtags and manipulated algorithms to bring awareness to issues like police brutality (Shelton 2019) and violence against Black trans women and trans folks of color (Jackson 2018). At the root of all these digital practices is 1) a clear use of technology as a means of resistance against the racist, capitalist, heteropatriarchal systems and machines that continuously 'other' and discredit Black experiences and 2) an understanding that although technology is not without its limitations and flaws, it can be used to garner the care, justice, and liberation that we all deserve. For that reason, it is to no surprise that Black people are working, writing, existing, resisting, healing, organizing, and surviving using various technologies and digital platforms; Black folks have always used technology in these ways (Steele 2021). However, given the extensive and gruesome histories that Black people have endured at the hands of varied research communities/practices, it is necessary for those invested in learning from Black and multiple-marginalized experiences to approach all forms of research

they engage with criticality and care, regardless of where and how that research takes place. Of course, this becomes especially important when it comes to digital research, as digital research is already well-known for its ongoing ethical dilemmas around public vs. private data (Adkins 2018), participant protection (Banks and Eble, 2007), identity construction (Brown 2019), and so forward.

This dissertation, in response to these things, is largely a discussion of digital research ethics; though, it is not your typical ethics discussion. This project asks readers to take a moment to consider an orientation to digital ethics that specifically emphasizes the protection of Black and multiple-marginalized groups through a) a centering of Black feminism and its values, b) a deep-felt commitment to being accountable to the digital spaces and communities we engage in our work, and c) a decentering of the institutions we are connected to in our decision-making processes. This project works to resist the logics and rules that are often implemented and sustained by institutions and their stakeholders that do not critically consider those whose identities immediately place them at significant risk of exploitation and harm. Developed out of the experiences of Black women digital researchers – myself included – this project explores what it means to do research on and around Black digital experiences and positions Black feminist theory as a rich area of thought in the reconsideration and development of digital research methodologies. But before I go into more detail about the contents of this dissertation, it is important that I 1) define my use of the word 'digital' as it will (re)appear consistently throughout the remainder of this dissertation, 2) define digital ethics through as it will be approached in this study, and 3) share the story that brought me to this work.

Defining Digital: Combining the Digital with the Embodied

Throughout this text, the word 'digital' will be used in a broad manner, as the definition encompasses an ongoing relationship between computational processes, composing practices, human bodies, and human experiences. Earlier articulations of the word digital, particularly when presented in the context of online and internet environments, tend to confine the definition to the technological places and spaces that are made up of 0s and 1s -- patterns and processes strategically developed in aims of creating, processing, and outputting communicative data (Kolko et al., 2000; Haas, 2007). As computer-based technologies and internet environments have become increasingly complex with millions of users, the word digital has expanded to encompass the development of softwares, applications, and media that simultaneously engage computational processes as well as the humans that regularly navigate them. When André Brock (2020) makes the distinction between the concepts of 'cyberculture' and 'culture that is online' in *Distributed Blackness,* he positions the digital less as 'patterned process' and more as environmentally situated. More plainly, the digital is where communication, community, culture, and technology coexist. This human-gauged, human-centered understanding of digital technology suggests that the digital is inseparable to the body, as anything digital would not exist if not for the corporeal bodies that create, make up, and shape digital data, spaces, existences, and experiences. In writing studies, technical communication scholar Angela Haas (2007) approaches definitions of the digital through an embodied lens, defining digital as inseparable to the physical body and positioning all things digital as both made by and through the fingers (p. 84). From a decolonial perspective, she asserts that definitions of digital should take into account the ancient and historical communicative processes that have always been executed through the use of codes just as much as they were through the fingers (also known as 'digits'); examples of

this can include Mayan hieroglyphs, Chinese logograms, Aztec codices, wampum belts, and even more recently, Western hypertexts (Haas, 2007, p. 84). Therefore, my definition of the word digital is an interworking of all of these things; 'digital' is as computational as it is human. And when it comes to digital research (i.e., research that simultaneously interrogates content created by both computational process and human influence), this interpretation of the digital is especially critical in how we continue to understand the ramifications of our work on digital contexts, digital data, digital practice, and digital citizenship.

Defining Ethics: Exploring Ethical Dilemma and New Framings

When it comes to digital research ethics, conversations around the topic are vast and field-dependent. Early conversations around digital research ethics emerged originally out of areas such as internet studies, media and communication, and a host of other social-science related fields (Frankel and Siang, 1999; Ess and the AoIR, 2002; Markham, 2006; Ess, 2009; Ess and Consalvo, 2011; Buchanan, 2011). In relation to writing studies-related fields (e.g., composition studies, rhetorical studies, technical and professional communication, etc.), scholars have been concerned with research ethics for the past two decades (Banks, 2006; McKee and DeVoss, 2007; Adkins, 2018; Gruwell, 2019; Agboka, 2021). For example, in thinking through the implications of digital research and scholarship, Adam Banks (2006) forwards that before we do work that engages the digital, we must realize that early conversations of digitality largely exclude African American and Black digital users, despite the fact that a large part of "African American rhetorical history [includes] Black people's pursuit of transformative access to [technology]" (p. 6-7). This, alone, suggests that in the field's long lineage of digital scholarship, methods for studying Black life and existence in digital spaces are lacking. Because, as

previously mentioned, the study of Black digital users and publics is now popular, this is an ethical issue all in itself.

In specifically thinking through the kinds of methods we employ to address ethics in digital research, Banks and Eble (2007) discuss digital ethics in relation to institutional review boards (IRBs), positing that although IRBs are a seemingly good tool to use when conducting digital research, researchers in social science fields should also "think rhetorically about risk and benefit" when it comes to our work, participant protections, and our overall research goals (p. 42). Technical communication scholar Godwin Agboka (2021) echoes this sentiment, sharing over a decade later that relying on the expertise of IRBs in one's research is risky as they account for "only a small part of what researchers must consider in addressing considerations of ethics in research" (p. 162). Accompanying conversations around IRBs and participant protection, scholars have also talked about the dilemmas of deciphering between public and private data (Adkins, 2018; Gruwell, 2019). Tabetha Adkins (2018), for example, uses her scholarship to not only provide insight to what an application of ecofeminist research methodology might look like in the field, but she also uses her work to forward a rhetorical heuristic that directly considers the habits of the digital users and communities that compose and share the texts we study. In her work, conversations around what constitutes public data vs. private data reside in the 'associations' between users and take into consideration whether or not digital users are likely to interact with each other again within the same space. She, like Banks and Eble (2007), asserts that "social media scholars must be cautious and methodical when determining how to study and represent their findings because the relationship between life on and off the web is complex and complicated" (p. 65).

In recent years, scholars like Leigh Gruwell (2019) have used their knowledge and expertise on conversations of ethics in the field to begin crafting digital research practices that align with their personal and professional identities. For example, working out of feminist scholarship, Gruwell (2019) submits that because digital technologies are "enmeshed in structures of power that can devalue…feminist methodologies that foreground social justice and attempt to undo gendered and/or raced power imbalances" (p. 87), digital researchers who work out of these areas are not only responsible for addressing ethical issues that relate to participant protection and privacy but also to issues involving labor, identity and positionality, and knowledge creation and validation (p. 89). She also shares that many digital research methodologies fail to address the precarious and toxic nature of the Internet as well as how it might directly impact scholars' research practices (p. 90). Thus, in all of these explorations of digital ethics, scholars working with/within the digital seemingly faced a single question:

- *How do we conduct digital research in ways that do not bring harm to the data, participants, and communities we engage?*

This brief exploration of the field reveals that when engaged in conversations around ethics, scholars in writing studies-related fields largely consider the impacts of their scholarship on digital users and communities. This awareness is largely due to the field's orientation to writing and text production, rhetorical practice, and communicative practice as inherent to human/lived experience (Royster, 2000; Duthely, 2017; McKoy et al., 2020). What these articulations of digital ethics seemingly reveal, though, is that 1) approaches to ethics in writing-related fields are case-based and/or contextually situated (Adkins 2018), 2) researcher positions and institutional affiliations greatly impact how concepts like 'harm' are conceptualized and acted upon (Eble and Banks, 2007), and 3) digital research methods and practices situate ethics as largely concerned

with researcher identity and orientation (Gruwell 2019). For this reason, my definition of digital research ethics in this dissertation relates specifically to the ways digital researchers 1) come to and articulate principles that respond to harm and dilemma in their work and 2) carry out practices and procedures that not only work to help curb harm but develop in tandem with their identity via their social, cultural, and institutional positions. Still, this definition requires development. Because I, myself, am a researcher who identifies as a Black feminist, centers Black women in my work, and is ultimately concerned with the well-being of Black women and Black digital publics, I find it necessary to turn to Black feminist thought to further frame and contextualize my understandings of ethics. While the definition provided is a valid definition of digital research ethics, for the purposes of this dissertation I work to merge early definitions of digital research ethics in the field with definitions of ethics as articulated by Black feminist scholars and thinkers. In this, I apply the Combahee River Collective's notion of what constitutes a Black feminist identity, orientation, and praxis as well as Patricia Hill Collins Black feminist tenets.

Black Feminist Theory: Underlining Values and Ethical Obligations

As defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, ethics relates specifically to "the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group" (Merriam-Webster). In underscoring the principles and values of Black feminism, I, too, am able to locate how Black feminism orients itself to ethics. To do this work, I turn to the Combahee River Collective and Patricia Hill Collins as both provide in-depth understandings of the logics and ethics that Black feminism maintains. The Combahee River Collective Statement, for example, is one of the first documents to sculpt and outline the more modern understandings of what it means to take on a Black feminist identity and life orientation. Patricia Hill Collins' works, on the other hand, are by far

some of the most popular and concrete texts to provide insight to Black feminist epistemological thought, thoroughly covering Black feminist theory and explicitly naming values, practices, and ethical implications that emerge from it. Together, a closer examination of these texts can greatly contribute to conversations around Black feminist ethics and -- in the context of this dissertation -- digital research ethics.

The Combahee River Collective is a Black feminist group formed in the 1970s, working primarily as the "Boston chapter of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO)" (p. 304). Three years following the group's inception, members Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier collectively composed a statement that outlined the purpose, aims, commitments, and overall philosophy of the group (Combahee River Collective, p. 304). Their statement, verbatim, presents the group as "actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression…[seeing their particular task as] the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (p. 305). With this, the group's positioning clearly outlines a core belief and value of understanding and dismantling overlapping systems of oppression that disproportionately impact Black women and Black people. The group also pinpoints that in order to go about this work, one must actively and simultaneously address not only issues of racism, sexism and classism --which are the typical concerns of feminists-- but also to issues of heteronormativity and sexual oppression, capitalism, and colonialism (Combahee River Collective, p. 309). Using the statement to largely discuss issues of power and politics, overlapping oppression, and desires for liberation, the group forwards that the 'personal is political' (p. 310), and asserts a politic that fosters concern for "any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World, and working people" (p. 315). Because principles and values translate directly into ethics, the

Combahee River Collective Statement outlines an ethic here that calls for an intentional and continued resistance against various hegemonic systems. For researchers who take on Black feminist identity or find value in the ethics outlined by it, this means that in order to enact Black feminist values and ethics, an on-going consideration and attunement to one's personal, social, cultural, professional, and institutional identities prove to be a necessity. Additionally, researchers should not only be attuned to the ways in which they benefit from capitalism but should actively work to redress the power dynamics and socio-economic disparities that could possibly be fueled by it. Largely, to enact a Black feminist ethic is to always be aware of the self and all of its identities in relation to the people and communities being worked with. While this may seem to be tedious, the purpose of these practices lies in Black feminism's commitment in 1) relying on embodied experience in creating knowledge and dismantling oppression, 2) protecting and supporting Black women and multiple-marginalized peoples, and 3) seeking liberation for Black people across the African diaspora (Combahee River Collective, p. 307-15).

Patricia Hill Collin's *Black Feminist Thought* largely works to introduce readers to Black feminist theory by "[emphasizing] Black feminist thought's purpose [in] fostering both Black women's empowerment and conditions of social justice" (loc. 174). Splitting the book into three separate sections, Collins uses the text to largely discuss the politics and features of Black feminist thought (part I), themes, conversations, and issues most relative to Black feminist thought (part II), and the larger, future view of what Black feminist thought may offer Black women and folks who work collectively with Black women across the globe (part III). Discussing Black feminist epistemology and Black feminist knowledge validation, Collins (2000) directly discusses Black feminist research methodologies by writing that Black feminist research practice is situated in direct contrast to the more "positivist approaches [that researchers

take] that allow them to "[follow] strict methodological rules…[and] distance themselves from the values, vested interests, and emotions generated by their class, race, sex, or unique situation" (p. 255). Instead, Black feminism values Black women's lived experiences and collective wisdom as a form of truth and knowledge (Collins, 2000, p. 256). Additionally, when it comes to Black feminism and ethics, Collins highlights four epistemological tenets that are central to Black feminist ethics and praxis. They are as follows:

- The acceptance of lived experience as a criterion of meaning (p. 257),
- The use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims (p. 260),
- The ethics of caring (p. 262), and
- The ethic of personal accountability (p. 264).

With each of these tenets, assessments and values around how Black women create, validate, and implement knowledge emerge. For example, the values associated with Black women's cultural, social, and political lives are also the values presented and deeply reflected within Collins' ethics of care; this is especially important since Black women require care and are personally connected to multiple "social institutions that support an ethic of caring in their [day-to-day] lives (e.g., the Black church) (p. 263-264). In terms of personal accountability, Collins states that "individuals must develop their knowledge claims through dialogue...present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas [and] be accountable for [those] knowledge claims" (p. 265). This idea of developing claims through dialogue is, too, directly connected to Black cultures and Black experience, as "assessments of an individual's knowledge claims simultaneously [evaluates their] character, values, and ethics" (p. 265).

Collins' outlining of Black feminist epistemological tenets supports a Black feminist research ethic and provides clear implications of what research methods for Black feminist

scholars might look like. Drawing correlations between researcher values and ethics, Collins work, similar to that of the Combahee River Collective, demonstrates that Black feminist ethics are always defined through both the self and through proximity and relationship to the communities one is engaged in/connected to. Between these texts and areas of thought, there are multiple, explicit calls for actions and considerations that prioritize embodied knowledge and experience, community connectedness, ethics of care, and ethics of personal accountability -- all of which are aimed towards fostering resistance to hegemonic structures while protecting the interests and lives of Black women and Black people. To not adhere to these things is to ignore the traditions and knowledge validation processes that derive out of Black histories, communities, and general discourses. Thus, in order to enact a Black feminist ethic, relationship to and proximity with Black women, Black people, and Black communities is a must. While there is not much information around 'how' advanced this relationship needs to be, it should be enough to enact values around transparency, care, reciprocity, accountability, and all of the things that prioritize a researcher 'doing right' by the communities they engage. In other words, the means by which academics and researchers must approach such work and knowledge should move away from anything that can be labeled positivist or prescriptivist. Instead, researchers must be willing to do work that "calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth" (Collins, 2003, p. 66).

Though the Combahee River Collective's ethics are articulated a bit differently from the ones Collins outlines, both sets of values and ethics align in a sense that they are concerned with the well-being of Black women and people and they rely on knowledge practices that come out of lived experience. In merging definitions of digital research ethics and Black feminist ethics, I assert that a Black feminist digital ethic relates specifically to the ways in which researchers

come to, articulate, and carry out digital research practice that centers Black women's embodied and cultural knowledges, applies Black feminist ethics and praxis, and fosters resistance to multiple hegemonic academic and institutional structures.

In moving forward with my work around ethics and its engagement of the digital, I begin this project with a story around my dilemmas as a digital researcher concerned with ethics, as the experience and reality around my work are the primary reasons this project exists. The act of storytelling holds significant value to communities of the Black diaspora and works to locate the moments by which we come to understand how the world around us functions (Wa Thiong'o 1986; Nur Cooley 2020). For example, in April Baker-Bell's (2017) article "For Loretta", she employs a method of storying called 'Black feminist-womanist storytelling', building it upon the notion that critical reflection can assist Black women in coming to 'care and wisdom' -- both concepts being deeply embedded in Black feminist values, ethics, and praxis (Collins, 2014). While storying is important within Black traditions, stories are not bound to a single culture. When we tell stories, we make room to share the parts and pieces of ourselves that uncover even the things we sometimes fail to see. For example, this idea of storying towards meaning shows up even in areas of digital ethics, as researchers in writing studies-related fields "recognize the power of storytelling [as foregrounding] researcher positionality in service of reflection, theorization, and community-building" (Cagle, 2021). Thus, I combine these definitions of storying to share my experiences with digital research as a Black woman concerned with ethics. I employ reflective, critical storytelling around my digital research experiences here as a means of providing impetus for this work.

A Personal Story on Ethics

My work around digital research ethics began in Spring 2019, as a first-year PhD student taking a Black linguistics course outside of my department. Part of the final in this course was a presentation of a potential study that students in the class might later take up. Given the course topic area and my specific interests in digital writing and space, I decided to look into the intricacies of Black language on social media. More specifically, I wanted to look into a public Black Facebook group that I was part of to not only see how Black language was being used in general conversation but to assess how the use of Black language practice in that space impacted community-building and discourse circulation. My plan at the time was to choose three major conversation forums from the digital space, evaluate the content of these forums through the original post and all the subsequent comments, anonymize the participants in the conversation, code the data through Black language features (e.g., signifyin', cultural references, ethnolinguistic idioms, phonological patterns, etc.), and analyze the overall impacts of these language practices on the space itself and the community it engaged. Though the work that I wanted to do was approved by the instructor, I found myself in a state of reflection and unease as I prepared to collect data. Almost immediately, I realized that what I was doing felt overwhelmingly intrusive. As a member of the space, anonymizing the participants did not feel like enough. The data I was looking at was public and readily accessible, but the people behind the data were individuals with real lives, real experiences, real families, real struggles, and very real distrust(s) of the systems and institutions that they existed under. And while I, being a member of the group, was attached to this space for personal reasons, I was also a graduate student and researcher attached to an institution well-known not only for harming marginalized

groups[1] but for also not providing those harmed with the adequate support they afterwards needed.[#]

Most importantly, I -- as a researcher with a similar positioning as my potential participants -- became hyper-aware of the power dynamics of my research situation and concluded that what I was doing WAS intrusive. If I wanted to move forward with this work, I needed to make my actions known; I needed to be validated in my work and efforts by the community I was engaging. So, I decided that before I would move forward with my project, I would contact the admins of the Facebook group for their feedback on my next steps. I crafted an email presenting myself, my immediate institutional affiliations, my goals, and my aims. I directly inquired into whether or not I could collect data on the space for the final course project. In my communication, I addressed that I was a long-time participant and follower of the group and ensured that my work was only a potential study at the moment. I also informed admins that I would be sure to contact them and/or be in touch during the process of my work as well as if I decided to move forward with publishing in any way. It was a bit of an extensive process, but at the time it felt absolutely necessary.

With the first email I sent, I received no response. With the second email, one of the admins in the group posted a public message that addressed the group as a whole and informed us that any efforts in reaching out to admins for personal reasons were the correct things to do. Still, the group was ***not*** a place for academics to see or do potential research despite its public status. Plainly put, this was not a place to bring an unnecessary amount of outside, white, or institutional gaze. Instead, it was reiterated that the purpose of the group was to uplift Black people, bring awareness to the experiences of Black people and the systems we live under

[1] See Johnson (2019) and Dwyer (2019) more information on Michigan State University's history of harm to marginalized groups.

through dialogue, and help provide support for families who might have immediate, material needs. This was the general purpose and mission.

Though a bit disappointed that my research plans had come to a halt, I found myself relieved to finally have an answer. I also felt extremely proud of the admins I reached out to for being open and honest about not wanting them and their members to be subjected to the openness and potential harm that research sometimes warrants. In response to this, I dropped the project and adjusted my final to look at a more visible, public website. Still, the ethical concerns that led me to check-in with admins remained at the forefront of my mind and my work for the next few years of my studies.

A Moment of Merge: How Embodied Knowledge and Positional Values Sculpt Practice

The response from admins confirmed that the uneasiness I felt in my body about the potential research at hand was not just the result of imposter syndrome as a junior scholar, but rather it was a clear indicator that I was doing something ***right***. Often, the work of digital research is presented as easy and convenient for the simple fact that –for researchers-- it seems there is always access to a surplus of data. Though unspoken, this is highly reflected in the dramatic increase of digital scholarship over the past decade and the exceedingly lax ethical considerations offered by institutions and their review boards (IRBs) when scholars engage in digital research. Digital researchers and internet researchers who are deeply concerned with ethics, however, tend to understand that this work is everything but easy and convenient. In actuality, it consistently requires an on-going and deeper consideration of ethical praxis (Banks and Eble, 2007; Ess, 2009; Buchanan, 2011; Adkins 2018; Gruwell, 2019; franzke et al., 2020). There are many places, spaces, and areas that digital research can take place, but what exactly does this mean for those of us who engage in research in and around Black digital experience

and space? What does this mean when our data is made up of the writing, experiences, and contributions of populations who deeply understand systemic abuse and are already deeply skeptical people who maintain positions of power? How does this acknowledgement and understanding of Black experience shape researchers' methodological approaches to research and ethics? And, on a more personal note, because my love for Black people shows up across my work, what does that mean for my own research practice as well as for the researchers who look, think, work, and experience like me? Well, part of the answer to these questions comes directly from my Black feminist identity, as it not only directs the ways in which I come to my research but it largely sculpts how I view and navigate the world. Black feminism and the values that it maintains, to be clear, is the reason why I dropped my first project idea altogether.

Now, to (Briefly) Revisit Black Feminist Thought…

Black feminism, as defined by the Combahee River Collective (1977), is defined as a commitment to the "[struggle] against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression" as well as a commitment to the "development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that…major systems of oppression are interlocking" (p. 305). Theoretically driven through attunements to marginalized identity, community, and practice, Black feminism itself is an embodied way of resistance -- rendering the absolution of hegemonic systems as impossible without the expertise of those most directly impacted by them. Thus, this definition makes clear that the embodiment of a Black feminist identity requires more than an indulgence of theory; rather, Black feminism is a way of navigating life and the decision-making that comes with it.

The initial feelings of needing to be validated in my research efforts through the community came about entirely because of my Black feminist orientation to ethics via community and knowledge validation. Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (2014)

submits that an ‘ethics of caring’ and an ‘ethic of personal accountability’ are central to the Black feminist knowledge validation process, as “individuals must develop their knowledge claims through dialogue [with the community and]...present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas [and] be accountable for [those] knowledge claims” (p. 263-65). Ultimately, this reminds Black feminist theorists, learners, and practitioners that Black feminism situates knowledge creation as communal, making room to concurrently evaluate knowledge creators’ “character, values, and ethics" (Collins, 2014, p. 265).

As someone who is a Black feminist, a Black woman, a bisexual woman, and a working-class Southern woman, my position in the world deeply informs the ways I approach my work. Because Black feminism is deliberate in its ongoing aims to address and redress racism, sexism, classism, sex discrimination, capitalism, and colonialism (Combahee River Collective, 1977), I, too, must take up this aim and goal in all that I do. My orientation to the world and to my work, then, is that to not deliberately center these experiences and to not steadily consider the ramifications of my work on the people who also maintain these identities means that I am already doing harm. It goes without question that those who are Black, multiply-marginalized, and/or part of at-risk populations need to be protected in research. It is my personal belief, too, that those who occupy digital/internet spaces and make up a large portion of the work we digital researchers engage need to be doubly protected. Despite the ease and speed to which I could produce digital scholarship if I remained objective in my research endeavors, I realize that to remain objective in my research as a Black woman taking up Black scholarship is to be negligent of myself, my values, my community, and all who may encounter my work. In carefully and strategically considering my ethics in the digital research process, I have no choice but to turn directly to Black feminism.

Impetus for This Study

Motivated by a) the work of writing researchers who aim to expand conversations around methodology and ethics in areas of digital scholarship (Del Hierro and VanKooten, 2020; Gruwell, 2020), b) the desire to center research practices that subvert the long, gruesome histories of research abuse on Black people and Black communities, and c) the desire for digital researchers (more generally) to pay closer attention to how they study, construct, and engage Black identities, activisms, and communities in their work (Brown, 2019), this dissertation study centers the experiences of Black feminist identifying digital research(ers) in writing studies-related fields as a way to better understand how their values, embodied knowledges, and experiences assist them in making methodological and ethical decisions in digital scholarship.

As of recent, the field of Rhetoric and Composition finds priority in developing digital research methodologies that "foreground phenomena, emphasize ways of knowing, and highlight ethics, inclusion, and justice" (Del Hierro and VanKooten, 2020).
While some frameworks and research methodologies place explicit prioritizations on supporting and protecting research participants, some simply do not. Even more so, very few frameworks -- if any -- articulate what it means to support and protect Black participants and publics in digital research, despite the fact that histories of Black harm and exploitation in research have proven to be relentless and on-going. Thus, my choice in centering Black women and Black feminist-identifying researchers in this project stems directly from the fact that in order to enact a Black feminist ethic, an intentional centering of the practices and embodied knowledges of Black women is required. Black feminist theory is largely underdeveloped in areas of digital research despite the fact that it has long theorized around ethics and has helped to contribute methodological reasoning to research conversations in multiple areas of study (e.g., bioethics,

sociology, media studies, women's studies, etc.) (Cheema et al., 2019; Taylor, 2018; Brown, 2019). The centering of Black women and Black people as multiple-marginalized groups makes room for a wider examination of the ways race, gender, sexuality, class, etc. interact with each other and work to cultivate specific lived experiences and circumstances, thus prompting digital researchers to also reflect on themselves and their experiences as they move throughout various spaces, places, and research situations. To get to the core of how Black feminist thought might inform digital research ethics, this research project largely asks and responds to the following question:

> *How do Black women and Black feminist digital researchers in writing studies negotiate/center their values, experiences, and embodied knowledges in their decision-making processes? How do these things also help to address ethical dilemmas that arise in research?*

Understanding that conversations around digital research ethics vary by field, institution, methodology, and researcher position, scholars in writing studies-related fields can use the experiences, knowledges, and practices of Black feminist digital researchers to begin developing critical digital methodologies that 1) address current dilemmas in digital research around Black and multiple-marginalized populations and 2) continue to address the ever-present tensions that arise in digital work.

With the digital spaces that Black people regularly occupy, there very clearly needs to be more critical and nuanced conversations around research ethics that reconsider the parameters of what is public and private as well as what participant protection looks like outside of general practices like data anonymization. Additionally, these conversations need to address 1) what constitutes as accountability to the communities we engage when community members are

distrustful (and even resistant) to the institutions we are attached to and 2) how the cultural contexts and social positionings that sculpt people's digital identities directly impact the way we should approach our data research. Simultaneously grounding oneself in Black feminist thought and learning from the perspectives of Black women who embed Black feminist values in their research practices is a way to begin this work.

What to Expect From This Text

In this introductory chapter, I have defined my use of the word 'digital' and presented my own personal story around ethics, highlighting the dilemmas I have encountered and threading together conversations around the power and fragility that is Black digital space. Following Chapter 1, *Chapter 2: Tech, Ethics, and Black Feminist Futurity* works as a literature review, making three specific moves that 1) outline the history and theory related specifically to Black people's engagement and relationship with technology and digital space, 2) further trace conversations of ethics both inside and outside of rhetoric and writing related fields, and 3) highlight the contributions to Black feminist theory that ask us to reconsider our orientations to community and ethics. Ultimately, *Chapter 2's* review of literature threads conversations around digital technology, research ethics, and Black feminist thought in ways that emphasize the need for a Black feminist research methodology that accurately address the marginalized populations at center of Black digital research.

Chapter 3: A Conversation (and Critique) of Methods and Ethics reviews the research and interview protocol I followed while preparing and engaging this qualitative study. Diving into Black feminist methodology and framing, this chapter presents my methods for conducting a series of semi-structured virtual interviews with research participants and explores how Black feminist methodology assists in navigating the cultural and institutional rules that remain 'good

practices' despite their often uncritical and outdated measures. *Chapter 4: How Black Women and Black Feminism Can Inform Research Methodology and Ethical Practice* explores my data, highlighting the moments in the interviews where Black feminist digital researchers began making explicit connections to ethics through their identities, their Black feminist values, and the methods they tend to employ when engaged in research. *Chapter 5: Using Black Feminist Perspectives and Knowledge(s) to Revisit Ethical Commonplaces in Digital Research* pays attention to these women's experiences and helps to paint a larger picture of how Black feminist identity and values are deeply connected to every action taken in the research process; this largely makes room for the support and protection of the people and communities who make up their data. Chapter 5 also stresses that to engage a Black feminist ethic means to understand that one's work is on-going, uneasy, and shifting in knowledge and praxis as it continuously develops.

Chapter 6: A Beginning Rather Than an Ending: Storying Towards a Black Feminist Digital Research Methodology and Heuristic works as both an ending and a beginning. Summing the contents of the dissertation through story while also sharing implications for Black feminist work around ethics in years to come, this chapter begins the work of expanding Black feminist methodology to build a heuristic for digital researchers looking to learn from Black feminism's contributions to digital ethics. Merging my own experiences as well as those of my research participants, this chapter discusses what a Black feminist digital methodology and ethical guideline might entail when applied to research practice, teaching, service, and so forward. This chapter, again, stresses that the work of Black feminism is on-going human work -- especially within the framing of the digital. Thus, the practices highlighted here can be applied to Black digital research just as much as they can be applied to anything else.

As you encounter the work of this dissertation study, I want to be clear that this work is about listening to AND learning from Black women. No matter the context, the centering of Black women in digital/tech-centered and social justice conversations makes room for more complex understandings of how multiple overlapping and intersecting identities not only construct specific lived experiences but also provide insight to practices that can provide support in areas of life, work, and community (Bailey, 2011; Duthely, 2017; Steele, 2021; Mckoy et al., 2022). As you encounter the chapters in this project, here are five (5) things you should continuously keep in mind and come back to as needed:

1) Black women (and Black folks, as a collective) have an extensive history in confronting and resisting systems of oppression by developing spaces and strategies that take on the work of resistance, healing, and community,
2) As technology and conversations around digitality develop, inquiries into how technology and digitality play a role in Black women and folks' lives will also continue to develop,
3) In a world where we regularly discuss and hold tensions around what it means to engage social justice, anti-racism, and equity-based work, the livelihoods and perspectives of Black women and folks will always pique interests of those who are invested in either dismantling white supremacy or upholding it,
4) How we go about our learning and engagement of Black women and folks' livelihoods and perspectives -- especially through digital technologies -- plays a significant role in whether we are dismantling or upholding white supremacy,
5) This dissertation research is a result of my experiences as well as the Black women like me who are dedicated to the dismantling --and eradication-- of white supremacist power, influence, and logics in academic research and the institutional figures that engage it.

As we enter an era where rhetoric, writing, and communication-based fields place special priority on digital methodologies that forward equity, this study makes room for us to work and research from a place of resistance -- a place where Black women and Black people's overall

being are centered, considered, and cared for by researchers and the institutions they are attached to. While the centering of values, methods, ethical groundings, and experiences of Black digital scholars and users will help to further develop a Black feminist digital methodology, this centering also -- and most importantly- makes room for us to hold ourselves and each other accountable in the work that we do.

Chapter 2: Tech, Ethics, and Black Feminist Futurity: A Review of Literature

Digital ethics is an on-going conversation topic in fields such as Internet Studies, the Digital Humanities, and Writing Studies[2] (Zimmer, 2010; Dadas, 2016; Adkins, 2018; Reyman & Sparby, 2019; Cagle, 2021). As civic discourse and political protest continue to find a home in online and internet spaces, conversations around digital research ethics must also continue to take place since 1) research on and around these spaces is becoming more popular, 2) human lives are inherently tethered to and represented by the data that makes up these spaces, and 3) there is a significant need for researchers to not put Black spaces, Black women, and Black activism(s) at further risk (Banks, 2006). Fields engaged in digital research always need new insights, lenses, and methodologies to more carefully think through their approaches to such work.

In efforts to locate alternative and ethical approaches to digital scholarship concerning Black women, Black community, and Black digital space, this chapter will provide a review of literature that makes three distinct moves. First, to fully understand the gravity and importance behind research practices that prioritize and protect Black digital citizens, their identities, and their respective communities, I present conversations around the history and interconnection of technology and Blackness. Highlighting the disruptive yet ever-evolving relationship between the two, I emphasize how necessary conversations of ethics are to research on and around Black digitality and experience. Next, I examine conversations around research ethics by introducing developing ideas around ethics and methods in Rhetoric and Composition. This allows me to not only situate research ethics as a priority, but also highlight overarching values of research ethics through scholarship, theory, and practice. Lastly, I introduce Black feminist thought/theory as

[2] For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the terms writing studies and writing-related studies to encompass fields of rhetoric, composition, technical and professional communication, communication, and so forth.

both deeply underrepresented in conversations around research ethics in Rhetoric and Composition despite it's long-standing history of addressing ethics and it's on-going presence in qualitative research. Identifying a gap where Black feminist thought diverges from other theory and can make lasting impact on digital research practice, I forward that 1) there needs to be more emphasis on how Black feminist methodologies might inform digital ethics, and 2) more attention needs to be paid to Black feminist and Black feminist-adjacent research(ers) in how ethics are addressed, understood, and situated in scholarship. By doing this, it is my belief that scholars in writing studies-related fields can begin developing critical digital methodologies that continue to address the ever-present tensions and ethical dilemmas that continuously arise in digital research.

Humans, Technology, and Everything In-Between: A History of Black Existence and Research Ethics

In order to grasp the urgency of ethical research practice in digital spaces, the overarching relationship between technology and race must first be explored. Whether based in medical research, sociological research, internet research, or another form, the history and relationship between Black people and developing technologies is a complex one, revealing a number of dark and ethically challenging moments around research and technological advancement. To conduct any kind of research on Black people and Black spaces without first and foremost acknowledging the abusive history of research on and around Black people, communities, and bodies is negligent all in itself. Harriet A. Washington's (2008) *Medical Apartheid*, explores such a history, digging into the long, gruesome past of exploitative research practices on Black Americans by American medical communities looking to develop in areas of medicine and human science. Working as a "thematically organized collection of historical and

contemporary issues in medical research with African Americans [and] illustrated by multiple important cases" (p. 17), Washington's work overviews a number of experimentation practices during American slavery, demonstrating how technical and scientific developments in medicine were the result of a need for both slave owners and physicians to 'preserve the slave's health' (p. 25). Because slavery guaranteed economic security for slave-owning families as well as test subjects for medical research communities, African Americans found themselves in a predicament where the profits of others outweighed their own humanity. It is also this line of reasoning that has helped to sustain the fact that African Americans have a rate of "abusive, involuntary experimentation…[that is] higher than other ethnic groups" (p. 20). As a result, modern research communities are growing more adamant about research disclosure, as it ensures that "[research] subjects [are] aware that they are participating, [are] informed, [are entitled to] consent, and [are] allowed to weigh the possible risks and benefits" of the studies being conducted (p. 6).

Of course, Washington's example of research practice as harmful to Black populations is not the only one. In addition to studies like the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment and the aforementioned experiments that supported racial biases and slave labor (Washington, 2008), the Clark Doll experiment is an example of a sociological study that —while used to overturn legislation that upheld segregation in schools— demonstrates a history of harm to Black participants and researchers alike. The Clark Doll Experiment was a research study that took place during the 1930s-1940s where Black children were given black and white dolls and asked to share who they identified with more. The Black children in the experiment overwhelmingly chose the white dolls over the black dolls, associating the white dolls as 'pretty' and 'good' while attributing negative traits to the Black dolls. While journalist Ernie Suggs (2019) takes

time to briefly discuss the historical significance of the Clark Doll experiment, they also explore the impact of the experiment on the Black children and Black bodies involved — a component of research that is far too often ignored. Forwarding the exact words of Kenneth Clark, one of the primary researchers in the Clark Doll Experiment, Suggs (2019) shares that when conducting the experiment, "some of the children stormed out of the room and became 'emotionally upset at having to identify with the doll that they had rejected.'" Additionally, Suggs (2019) reveals that because the results of the study were so emotionally devastating to Kenneth and Mamie Clark, they found themselves delaying the publishing of their research conclusions. While the research at hand was meant for the betterment of the children and community it centered, the engagement of the study itself has sparked conversation in recent decades of being traumatic and inconsiderate of the psychological harm imposed on the participants at hand. The exploitation of Black people and communities through research still does not end here though, as even more recently it has been discovered that the bones of Black children who were murdered in the 1985 MOVE bombing have been used as a "case study in an online forensic anthropology course" in Princeton" (Pilkington, 2021). One of the worst parts of this is that the children's surviving parents never even gave the instructor or the institution consent to have the remains.

Examining the ethical sides of medical, social, and technical research reveals clear parallels between research thought and practice, particularly when it comes to how research is carried out around Black populations. Because there is a distinct history there, the protections and safety of Black people (regardless of how they are actually being researched) needs to be prioritized in scholars' research endeavors. Though IRB processes are required for human participant research, the guidelines around what defines 'human research' as working with humans is still messy and largely undefined (Banks and Eble, 2007; Agboka, 2021). As clearly

demonstrated, research communities have a history of stripping Black populations of their humanity in order to follow-through with their scientific inquiry (Washington, 2008; Pilkington, 2021) when, in actuality, the engagement of research around Black populations (both digital and non-digital) should work endlessly to reinscribe that humanity. What researchers often fail to realize is that when it comes to conducting research on/around the lived experiences of Black people and populations, it is necessary to acknowledge that harm and trauma are likely to be part of the conversation. As Black exploitation has proven to be on-going in varied research circles, history reveals that without the full recognition of this abusive history nor the prioritization of care in research practice, research, in general, has the ability to do more harm than good if it fails to consider the needs of their participants and/or ignore the implications of race, history, and identity in research conversation, planning, and procedure.

Conversations on Technology and Identity Construction

Just as topics of race and identity are central to research conversations, these topics are also central to conversations around technology, particularly when it comes to digital and internet spaces. Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman's (2000) *Race in Cyberspace* as well as Nakamura's (2002) *Cybertypes* are both early looks at the ways race and digital environments have the ability to co-construct and complicate each other. Highlighting race as 1) unstable and 2) deeply implicated in various digital platforms and processes, early texts around race, identity, and technology understand the interconnectedness of these concepts as "cultural phenomena [that is] made up of on-going processes of definition, performance, enactment, and identity creation" (Kolko, 2000, p. 10). For example, Tara McPherson's (2000) chapter in *Race in Cyberspace* explores the cyber-South and white men's use of the web to both explore and anchor Southern identity -- something that they often find difficult to openly do in the 'real' world.

From this, the author comes to the conclusion that the implications of the cyber-South and how it values race/race relations cannot go ignored when studying the development and sustainment of the space itself. McPherson's sentiment that learning from and reshaping the South (and it's racial history) by examining its racial boundaries further suggests that if we begin to move away from theories that present race as static on the web, we have more of an ability to measure the ways that race might impact and develop social being, structure, and interaction as they find home in digital spaces. This very closely echoes the later work of Nakamura (2002), as she also forwards that in order to fully understand the impacts of race, racialized bodies, and racialized experiences on the web, it is absolutely necessary to "examine the ways that racism is perpetuated by both globalization and communications technologies...across a range of discursive fields and cultural matrices" (p. xviii). Both Kolko et al and Nakamura make a clear case for actively disrupting the ways we understand race so that we can better center it, theorize around it, and gain a fuller view of its impacts and possibilities in digital space. If the convergence of these concepts is critical in understanding how the internet both functions and sustains itself, it , too, is central to the work of digital researchers. Even more specifically, when it comes to the work and existence of digital Black citizens and publics, a critical, in-depth look at the functions of race is absolutely central to grasping the purpose, urgency, and legitimacy that often shapes Black digitality.

Encoded Anti-Black Racism: Technology and its Discrimination(s) of Blackness

Narratives around the beginnings of the internet reveal a culture that has historically centered white male bodies, often excluding Black and non-white tech developers and internet users by either silencing them or overlooking the contributions they have to offer in areas of digital development (Benjamin 2019b). As these narratives are key to uncovering an even larger

story of how technology is both developed and sustained through racism and white supremacy, we must recognize that systems will always serve the populations that they are intended for. This is true socially and politically just as much as it is technologically.

Safiya Noble's (2018) *Algorithms of Oppression*, for example,. takes an in-depth look at the ways in which racism is encoded into algorithmic data online. Focusing the text primarily on various Google searches and related data, Noble highlights that because "human beings are the ones developing the digital platforms we use" (p. 2), the biases and racialized stereotypes that humans carry will inherently transfer over into the digital software and tech that is developed. The hyper-sexualization of Black women and girls (and their bodies) on the web in Google's early days was very clearly a result of the problematic narratives that have been constructed around Black female sexuality and identity. Because algorithmic data shapes --and is shaped by-- the perceptions of humans, we see through this instance alone how technology has the ability to perpetuate racist, sexist, classist, etc. ideas around Black people and other multiple-marginalized groups. The interrogation of this programmatic failure propels a conversation around "the implications of the artificial intelligentsia [particularly] for people who are already systematically marginalized and oppressed" (Noble, 2018, p. 3). Because people who belong to these populations must also navigate the fact that digital technologies often concretize and/or reinforce a myriad of inaccurate and harmful narratives about them, it is even more crucial that those who consider themselves users, contributors, and even researchers of digital and internet technologies don't perpetuate the very biases that are already both located within and forwarded by these technologies.

Over the years, Black people have had to use their cultural knowledge(s) to navigate and master technology, often subverting the oppressive forces behind technology and creating rich,

powerful histories and methods of resistance (Banks, 2006; Steele, 2021). For example, in discussing the presence of Black digital users in online spaces, Banks (2006) points out that the "heavy use of Black linguistic, discursive, and rhetorical patterns one finds on [sites like BlackPlanet] connects…tradition to digital futures [and] connects resistance to [issues of] access to resistance and transformation" (p. 73). While many continue to see the internet and its uses as harmless and neutral, again, we must remember that no technology is ever neutral (Nakamura, 2002; Banks, 2006; Arola, 2010; Noble 2018; Shelton, 2019; Benjamin 2019a). Biases and racial stereotypes are encoded into systems because the people who created such systems allowed them to be; this often results in difficulty, harm, and unchecked aggression towards marginalized groups (Gruwell, 2019). This is only but one reason that digital researchers must be more vigilant about understanding the relationship between Black being, Black identity, and technology, as the three are intricately linked and work to form a rather interestingly complex story around technology and Black people's engagement with it.

Black Engagements of Digital Technology and Culture

Social media sites, blog forums, video platforms, and countless other digital spaces have been deemed as places of work and refuge for a number of Black populations. Though it is apparent that the use and engagement of varied technologies bring about their own set of issues to Black digital citizens and media users, the affordances of technology largely include Black people's ability to occupy digital and tech spaces in ways that help us both define and create our communities, imagine new futures, and catapult change. For Black women particularly, the use of these spaces is often a reminder of the possibilities of technology, especially in its ability to foster thought that assesses and critiques the harms, orders, and limitations of the physical world. Michelle Wright's (2005) article "Finding a Place in Cyberspace: Black Women, Technology,

and Identity", for example, focuses on the uses of technology through Black women by not only exploring the relationship between Black women and technology itself but by also making a number of strategic, rhetorical moves to show the complexities of the relationship. In her analysis of Black women scholars who are digital and internet users, she writes the following:

> Those of us who believe our work can and should speak to audience beyond the ivory tower need to engage the Internet as a discursive space not only because it can help us explore the dizzying chronotropic demands of diaspora, but [also] because it is increasingly the site where those ideas and ideologies that Nakamura (2002) so eloquently outlined function ever more frequently and broadly. (Wright, 2005, p. 57)

Wright's examination of Black women's relationship to technology reveals that the work and discourse that comes out of the relationship between Black identity and technology is one that is ever-important and worth questioning. To not engage with technologies that make room for this kind of work only allows for these spaces to remain confined to the white, heteropatriarchal, etc. limitations that they were created in. Not closely looking into/taking in digital use by all people(s) further reveals the "...uncanny and disturbing resemblance(s) [of] racist [belief around] race and technology" (p. 49). As the relationship between Black women/people's identities and digitality continues to be developed, there needs to be even more inquiry into how the two more clearly expand and strengthen one another. Brock's (2020) *Distributed Blackness* is a text that moves forward with some of this work.

Examining Black technocultures as places/spaces on the web where Black people have participated in "sociality and digital practice," Brock (2020) looks into how Black digital users have participated in cybercultures in ways that "decenter whiteness as the default internet identity" (p. 5). An example of this lies in Brock's explanation of Twitter, Twitter's design

principles, and the ways in which Black digital users are able to bring their values, cultures, and discourses to a platform and completely (re)shape the purposes and functionalities of the platform itself. Brock (2020) writes:

> Twitter's design principles allow users to access and engage with the service with little loss of functionality across a wide number of device, client, and protocol configurations, including mobile telephones. In turn, this wide reach and access enabled minority internet users to adapt to an online service that appears to fit neatly into the offline practices they use in everyday life. The informal communication evidenced in Black Twitter is not idle play; it works as an affirmation of the humanity and sensuality of the Black community in an online space that is unused to this type of spectacle. (p. 123)

Because Black tech users engage in Black culture and identity online to create new(er) experiences, the implications of these actions then bring into question the functions and importance of Black technology, including its uses and all of its possibilities.

Black people's history with technology, use of technology, and resistance both to and within tech and digital spaces is one that -- if not handled carefully -- can cause more harm than good. Given the complexities between Black identity and technology, there is a particular kind of awareness and attunement that must come with such work. For Black women specifically, because their use of tech and digital spaces is a direct juxtaposition to the more dominant historical images and problematic social constructions of Black womanhood, how scholars and researchers approach the studying and engagement of these spaces only reiterates how important it is for the identities, motives, and needs of those being studied to simultaneously centered, handled with care, and in-depthly and critically considered. All of this points towards

conversations of digital ethics, a field and concept that has been engaged since the early-to-mid 2000s.

Tracing Conversations of Research Ethics: Troubling the Human and the Digital

As digital writing and digital rhetoric studies become more central to the work of those in writing studies-related fields, digital scholars in the field should also understand their responsibilities to ethics in a number of ways. In 2004, College Composition and Communication (CCCC), published the "Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research in Composition Studies." This document, a grounding ethical research document in Rhetoric and Composition, asserts that individuals who identify as composition specialists should "share a commitment to [protect] the rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being of the persons...involved in their studies" (p. 779). While the guidelines do not explicitly address digital research, it does state that when it comes to describing/writing around individuals and groups in research, it is important to report data in ways that "are fair and serious, cause no harm, and protect privacy" (p. 783). As writing research has shifted into digital spheres, the guidelines used here can appear to be a bit vague, as we understand that the work that happens in digital spaces (as well as the identities that are developed in these spaces) are ever-shifting. The Guidelines for Ethical Research document is among a few of the first major conversations in Rhetoric and Composition that demonstrate writing researchers' early concerns with research ethics. It is a solid form of proof that for almost twenty years, Rhetoric and Composition has engaged in work around research ethics. Still, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of what engaging in this work -- especially in areas of digital research -- actually looks like.

McKee and Devoss' (2007) *Digital Writing Research* is another grounding text in Rhetoric and Composition that does the work of outlining an orientation to digital research ethics

by practitioners in the field. Throughout the text, re-emerging conversations around the implications of researching digital communities come to surface, often making room to explore the complexities, failures, and loopholes of following prescriptive research measures. For example, Rickley (2007) approaches digital research as a rhetorical situation and submits that research processes should directly reflect the purpose, aims, and goals of both the researcher and the space by which the research is conducted. As shown, these on-going conversations are a direct reflection of the larger discourses around digital research; it is clear that everyone is trying to figure out the same things. Being a field, we work to understand how language and cultural practices are innate to shaping how people function as communicators and world citizens. This becomes evidently clear in another foundational text[3] in the field as it asks researchers in the field to not only center digital spaces in their work but to also center the people and the data that makes up these spaces. This text formulates commitments to research that understand ethical obligation as an on-going process, encouraging researchers to see ethics as non-stable and dependent upon multiple factors (largely, the research participant(s), the research space, and the more intricate details of the research situation).

Theoretical Groundings of Ethics: How Values Shape Actions

Theoretical frameworks help to form people's perceptions of ethics, as theories work to maintain certain sets of values and social orientations. Within Writing Studies, there are a number of working bodies of knowledge that hold unique identities and promote specific digital research practices. How people align themselves with these bodies of knowledge often lend service to how they come to understand their research as well as how they carry that research out. As previously stated, values, ethics, and social orientations are deeply tied to how

[3] Due to imposed harm on one scholar from another, my citation politics do not make room for me to name/credit the authors of the mentioned text.

researchers choose and move forward with their methods; often, it is these very things that offer rationale to the methods, how they are applied, and how they are implicated in the researchers own identity. Decolonial theories (Cushman, 1996; Haas, 2012), queer theories (Johnson, 2000; Dadas, 2016; Browne and Nash, 2015; Rhodes & Alexander, 2015), and feminist theories (Clark-Parsons & Lingels, 2020; Reyman and Sparby, 2020; Gruwell, 2020) are prime examples of how one's research can be influenced by their commitments to specific worldviews, communities, and cultural practices. Feminist theory in the field, for example, reminds us that our actions and methods in digital research need to be reflexive, transparent, rhetorical, and reciprocative; this area of thought recognizes that our identities, emotions, and positions of power should play a larger role in how we choose our methods as well as how we navigate our interactions with varied cultures -- both human and digital (Gruwell, 2020).

While the theoretical frameworks mentioned discuss methods and ethics pertaining to marginalized populations, none of them have fully articulated what a research process might look like when working specifically with Black and/or Black women populations -- particularly, populations that find themselves (and their identities) at the intersections of multiple systems oppression. Therefore, I pose the following questions:

- How do we as researchers begin to develop frameworks that consider specific circumstances and issues that arise when engaging with multiple-marginalized populations; particularly, what methods do we consider when we engage in digital research?
- What do these research engagements look like?
- What are the values that undertake this kind of work?

- What are the ethical commitments that should be centered when choosing methods and thinking through issues relative to digital research?

In considering all of these questions and concepts, I, again, turn to Black feminist theory, as it not only facilitates discussions around the complexities of Black identity and (more specifically) Black woman identity, but it offers insights to how the values of Black feminism a) work to the benefit of such populations and b) translate into practice.

Black Feminist Values and Ethics: Developing Digital Methodologies Through Theory, Scholarship, and Practice

Black feminist theory is an area of social and academic thought that understands Black women's multiple, overlapping identities as a place of immense knowledge, resistance, and potential liberation. Interrogating the ways Black women navigate multiple jeopardy (King, 1988), Black feminist theory sees the complexity of Black women's identities and embodied experiences as a way to also understand and dismantle the inner-workings of hegemonic systems. In other words, it uses Black women's experiences and expertise to continuously push back against the racist, sexist, classist, and capitalist systems that actively harm, kill, and silence Black women and Black populations.

While it should be no surprise that there is overlap in the traditions curated out of feminist theory and Black feminist theory, it must be known that feminist theory and Black feminist theory 1) come out of separate areas of history and resistance and 2) maintain distinct differences in values. While there is some overlap, feminist researchers (in Writing Studies as well as outside of the field) have a tendency to theorize around concepts of identity, emotion, and positionality, as all of these things play major roles in how research processes are carried out (Bizzell, 2000; Gruwell, 2020). When it comes to research methods, feminist researchers also

maintain values around reciprocity, transparency, and reflexivity, all of which are utilized in ways that can "better the lives of women and other oppressed groups" (Gruwell, 2019, p. 89). Black feminist researchers, on the other hand, do all of this but insist that their orientations to work must stem directly from embodied and lived Black women's experience (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Collins, 2014). Thus, the main difference between feminist theory and Black feminist theory lies in the fact that Black feminist thought is driven by Black being and existence. Additionally, Black feminist theory places a special emphasis on concepts of care, community connectedness, and lived experience, thus invoking that those who engage Black feminism be concerned not only with Black existence and survival, but also the 'hows' and inner-detailings of that survival.

Few & Far Between: The Lack of Black Feminist Ethics in Rhetoric and Composition's Digital Sphere

Despite it's long-standing history of addressing ethics and it's on-going presence in qualitative research, Black feminist theory is still largely underrepresented in conversations around research ethics -- let alone, digital research ethics -- in writing studies fields. While there are Black feminist identifying scholars and digital work that engages Black feminisms and thought (Kynard, 2010; Florini, 2014; Sawyer, 2017; Duthely, 2017; Shelton, 2019), very little explicit work is happening in the field around what it means to understand digital methods and ethics through Black feminist theory. Interestingly enough, there are digital works within the field that apply and discuss methods through a Black feminist framing.

Florini's (2014) "Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin" and Latoya Sawyers (2018) *Don't Try to Play Me Out* are both prime examples of digital scholarship and work within Writing Studies that are clearly informed through Black feminism and speaks to the ways Black feminist scholars

come to understand their ethical and methodological obligations in digital research. In exploring how Black digital citizens both construct and perform their identities through a series of communal and linguistic practices on Twitter, Florini writes that "Black users often perform their racial identities through displays of 'cultural competence' and the use of other non-corporal signifiers that rely on 'social and cultural resources" (p. 224). Because of this, Florini asserts that when engaging Black digital publics, participants at all levels, whether active performers or audience members, [must] possess specific forms of cultural knowledge" (p. 234). Thus, in order to get a full view of the Black digital user in their identity and space, knowledge(s) of Black identities, practices, politics, and culture are all required (p. 234). With *Don't Try to Play Me Out,* Sawyer (2017) conducted multiple rhetorical analyses of texts created and engaged by Black women populations online (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs) and "supplemented [her[online data with surveys and interviews of Black women who use those forms of social media" (p. 7-8). Understanding that Black women's use of digital space (especially when given an option to be exclusive and create private groups) allows them to find community without facing immediate risks of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, Sawyer's pairing of rhetorical and analysis prove be to a deeply care-oriented and reflexive move -- actions that are largely supported through Black feminist ethics. Both Florini and Sawyer's work represent the kind of attunement, care, and consideration that digital researchers need when gathering and analyzing data from Black/Black women communities. Both researchers recognize the value and importance of discourse and language in Black communities and use those cultural knowledge(s) to collect, analyze, and present their data. Both provide clear examples of how developing methodologies, methods, and ethics around digital spaces/communities should aim to

capture a more culturally relevant and full picture of who and what makes up the data; they give view to what a Black feminist research ethic looks like in practice.

Though there may not be a lot of explicit labeling of Black feminist ethics when developing and carrying out specific methods for working with/within Black digital datasets, both of the works presented here represent the values that Collins and the Combahee River Collective highlighted around reflection and reflexivity as well as participant protections. With that said, there **are** quite a few scholars outside of writing studies-related fields that engage Black feminism in their work and are a bit more explicit in how they use Black feminism as a means to disseminate data/information, develop methods, and situate ethics. As conversations of ethics are necessary for digital researchers to rethink and revamp their methodologies when engaging in such work, so is the examination of works outside of Writing Studies that outline and apply core Black feminist values. Doing this allows for a stronger understanding of the potentiality that Black feminism has when applied to digital research.

Black Feminist Digital Methods: Protecting the People and Identities That 'Are' the Data

In *Methodological Cyborg as Black Feminist Technology*, bioethics scholar Nicole Brown (2019) uses Black feminism, ideas around complex Black identities, and experience in the bioethics field to begin developing a research method that "[troubles] the conventional qualitative/quantitative dichotomy" and "[brings] together two seemingly divergent [research] approaches in service to Black feminist ways of knowing" (p. 55-56). Identifying this method to be a *methodological cyborg* OR (as specifically named in the article) computational digital autoethnography (CDA), Brown's meshing of qualitative and quantitative methods works to deepen the ways digital data around Black women are both collected and assessed. By discussing the use of mixed methods in cultural studies -- more specifically, the use of computational tools

and autoethnography -- Brown asserts that the combination of these methods makes room for computation to aid in much-needed identity work in research (p. 64). Speaking to the method's ability to address "computations' racialized and gender biases within its algorithmic assemblages," Brown's methodological cyborg works to use computation in ways that it previously has not been. In combining computation and autoethnography, the article insists that the methodological cyborg 1) places a priority on Black feminist knowledge-making practices and 2) "[allows] space for reflexivity, self-definition, recognition, and subjectivity" (p. 65).

Coming out of social movement studies, Gillan and Pickerill's (2012) work focuses on ethics by centering (and complicating) acts of reciprocity in one's research process. Though this article is not specific to digital research, the concepts presented in it are easily applicable. By reminding readers that on-the-ground activists tend to face all kinds of risks in their work, this article suggests that researchers enact an 'ethics of immediate reciprocation' when engaged in research that centers social movements and social justice/equity. In their view, immediate reciprocation is the act of supporting activists and research participants in their own work endeavors (p. 136). While this is an idea/ethic that is relevant and can do an exceeding amount of good, the chapter also points out the complications in this, as there is a current issue of 'activist-scholar' identities and activist agendas being taken on in academia in hopes of furthering one's career (p. 136). Ultimately, Gillan and Pickernill put forth that when it comes to ethical research practices, researchers should be honest in how they enact and maintain reciprocity.

Both of these works are aware and critical of how identity, power dynamics, and capitalist gains should be central to conversations around research ethics -- all of which directly align with Black feminist ethics. The texts also stress the importance of ethics/methodologies that 1) center multiply-marginalized identities and experiences, and 2) demonstrate that because

our methods have the ability to discriminate, they also have the ability to "create legitimacy, disruption, and liberation" (Brown, 2019, p. 60). In thinking about this in relation to Black feminist ethics, a Black feminist ethic seems to call for research practices that are innately radical and liberatory in their design. Gillan and Pickernill identify immediate reciprocity in their work, but I want to extend this concept even further to say that because Black feminist theory calls for reciprocity in the form of community relationship (i.e., validating knowledge(s) through discourse and community relationship), a more radical form of reciprocity might be created to 1) strengthen community members' relationship to the research process and 2) assign research participants agency in ways that have historically been denied to them. In terms of digital research, this could mean that if a researcher is working with an online community, not only is that researcher required to include community members in the research process, but the researcher is also required to have the approval of said digital citizens. This also means that even if the data is accessible to the researcher, if research participants and/or those associated with the digital space deny the relationship, the researcher may be required to adhere to their demands. To engage in such work requires a great deal of self-awareness, reflexivity, and concern for others. In other words, practices of the sort support an ethic and method attuned to the needs of people and their respective communities; this, in short terms, is what a Black feminist ethics requires. In continuing the conversation around how Black feminist ethics show up across research, below I discuss concepts and studies that are embedded in community connectedness and care as well as the protection of research participants.

Community Connectedness & Care. Pulling directly from Black feminist theories, values, and knowledges, Taylor (2018) recognizes the importance that in-depth interviews can hold as they make adequate amounts of room for storytelling practices and empathy -- all of

which are needed in data-collecting processes when working with Black women. Taylor's (2018) article "Rejecting Objectivity" uses reflections on in-depth interview processes as a way to address the roles, benefits, and responsibilities that critical self-reflection holds in Women and Gender Studies research. By reflecting on research situations where sensitive materials were shared by participants, Taylor (2018) uses the piece to focus on 'ethical critical practices,' asserting that "in-depth interviews can be as radical as a political protest" (p. 721). In reflecting on the moments in her interviewing and data collection processes where she had to make decisions around what to publish and what to keep confidential, Taylor (2018) locates a need for researchers to spend time not only developing trust with participants but paying close attention to the ways that participant histories and experiences impact the care in their research practices.

Like Taylor, Tillman's (2002) approach to research breaks down what a culturally sensitive research agenda looks like. Outlining the following as elements of culturally sensitive research for Blacks/African Americans, Tillman asserts that when it comes to interview Black women and Black populations, there is a need for a) the use of qualitative methods such as interviews and observations, as these "investigate and capture holistic contextualized pictures of the social, political, economic, and educational factors that affect the everyday existence of African Americans," b) a commitment to/responsibility for "maintaining the cultural integrity of participants and [community members]," c) a continuous attempt to "reveal, understand, and respond to unequal power relations that may minimize, marginalize, subjugate, or exclude the multiple realities and knowledge bases of African Americans," d) an understanding that "experiential knowledge [is] legitimate, appropriate, and necessary for analyzing, [interpreting], and reporting data," and e) a motive to used "culturally informed knowledge to propose...change and work [towards building] meaningful, productive relationships with the nonacademic

community" (p. 5). Tillman's work gives an in-depth look into the need for/application of culturally sensitive research approaches, and prompts that people think about "who" can conduct such research if cultural knowledge(s) are key to its success. Though Tillman submits that the overall discussion of the article is "not intended to suggest that a researcher must be African American to use culturally sensitive research approaches…[still] it is important to consider whether the researcher has the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences of African Americans within the context of the phenomenon under study" (p. 4).

With both of these works, parallels can be drawn in areas of community connectedness and care. By making room for practices that humanize research participants, make room for research participants to share their experiences, and continuously trouble power relations so that little-to-no harm comes those engaged in the research process, both of these works utilize a Black feminist ethic as they aim continuously interrogate the researchers' values around research, researcher-participant relationships, and power. This interrogation then leads to practices that not only rely on a more whole/holistic connection to the research participant, but also are intent on seeing the full human behind the data. This also speaks to a Black feminist ethic because the methods employed here make room for reflexivity, particularly around how researcher's relationships with the participants and communities are constructed and maintained throughout (and beyond) the research process.

Protecting Research Participants. Cheema et al. (2019) highlights that researchers have the ability to cultivate research methods and processes that capture, protect, and accurately represent people's overlapping, complex identities. Pinpointing Black feminist theory (i.e., intersectional theory) as a methodological approach to research, Cheema et al. (2019) posit that Black feminist thought makes rooms for those in health care to be/find ways to be 'inclusive and

empowering' (p. 1). The authors see a Black feminist methodology working in the following ways: a) in developing research questions directly around experiences of research participants, b) in choosing research methods that capture social inequities and push back against the consolidations of participants' experiences (e.g. Brown's (2019) methodological cyborg[4]), and 3) in dedicating time to analyze and revisit empirical data. By doing this, Similarly, Few et al. (2003) approaches research in family studies in ways that are empowering for [both] the community and those involved in the research process" (p. 205). Coming from the perspectives of three Black women scholars, Few et al. (2003) offer five strategies developed out of personal experience and Black feminism that support the following: 1) contextualizing the research, 2) contextualizing the self, 3) monitoring symbolic power, 4) triangulating multiple sources, and 5) caring in the research process. Because Black feminism "allows Black women to be directly involved in the research process through the sharing of analyses and…[the discussion] of experience," the use of Black feminism in one's study --regardless of the type of study -- can lead to 'good qualitative research,' as this is defined by the ability of the researcher to a) gather accurate and useful data and b) ensure that [informants are] central in the research process" (p. 207). Thus, both Cheema et al. (2019) and Few et. al (2003) acknowledge that multi-layered reflexive practices are central to good, ethical research, especially when it comes to ensuring the protections of Black women and their identities.

A Final Reflection: Imagining Black Feminist Digital Futures

When it comes to digital research -- particularly around the work of Black women and people -- we need grounding values and senses of ethics that shape how we form and play out our methodologies. In order to do this though, there are a number of things that we must first be

[4] See Brown (2019) for more information.

aware of. First, understanding the on-going and turbulent history between Black people and Black bodies and technology helps us to frame why digital/online research cannot ignore the relationship between the two; if we are to work with both, we must be in positions where we can hold the tensions with both. We must also make space to develop research methods and processes that refuse to view data abstractly, as all data is tied to humans and human experience. Second, knowing the broader history and engagement of ethical thought in digital research helps us think more around the major issues that tend to present themselves in digital scholarship. Being aware of these issues and this work makes room for us to be able to identify what ideas and methods might work for us in our own research endeavors. Lastly, because Black feminism is largely underused in conversations around digital research ethics, it is important that we begin to engage it more -- to see what it is, what it does, how people carry it out, and what it means to come to a place where you are confident in carrying out your research under a Black feminist framework.

As Black women/people continue to utilize digital space for a number of reasons and inquiries around these reasons continue to be made, it is necessary that fields like Rhetoric and Composition pay closer attention to the ways Black feminist researchers understand and enact ethics and methods. It goes without saying that we should want to be wary of engaging in practices -- as demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter -- that are unclear in ethical consideration; instead, we should want to be deliberate in the ways that we engage Black digital publics in all of their glory and complexities. It's imperative that we give priority to research practices and theoretical frameworks that not only help to demonstrate the power of digital communities, but actively work along with them to resist the systems that attempt to silence and erase Black digital presence and voice. Because we know that (ethically) Black feminism asks

Black feminists to continue theorizing and working in ways that assist in “dismantling systems of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism” (Cooper, 2015, p. 19), it is up to us to envision a future in the academy where Black feminist theory is not only taken more seriously intellectually but is critically -- and digitally -- engaged in ways that work to make the world a better place.

Chapter 3: A Conversation (and Critique) of Methods and Ethics

As we move towards understanding the potential impact of Black feminism on digital research ethics, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the meta-ness of this dissertation chapter. While I use this section to talk through my own methodological framing of this study, I also acknowledge that my work around ethics lends itself to the development of digital methodology in general. Thus, the purpose of the chapter is to review my interview protocol and provide insights into my chosen research methods. This chapter also goes deep into how Black feminism makes room to reconsider a number of cultural and institutional rules around research -- especially when those rules and practices are approached uncritically (i.e., IRBs and other lukewarm measures that institutions tend to immediately position as 'good' or 'standard'). The contents of this section are a combination of theory and applied praxis. I find importance in toggling between these two areas because it makes room for a fuller view of Black feminism as a both a research methodology and ethics paradigm. I draw primarily from Black feminist theory to guide me in my methodical and research-related decisions.

Revisiting Black Feminist Epistemology: Ethical Framing and Considerations

As more in-depthly discussed in Chapter 1, Black feminist epistemologies view and approach ethics by emphasizing the need to rely less on white, male-controlled ways of knowing and more so on Black woman-centered knowledge practices that develop through four ethical tenets: embodied knowledge and experience, community connectedness, ethics of care, and ethics of personal accountability (Collins, 2003). In outlining ethics, I use a Black feminist framework to investigate how, if, and where the fours tenets of ethical practice outlined in Patricia Hill Collins' work might be applied when digital researchers engage in research both with and around Black digital participants, communities, and datasets. As also mentioned, Black

feminism's outlining of ethics can similarly be located in the work of the Combahee River Collective (1977), as they push forward the idea that liberation for Black people includes a steadfast pushing back against multiple colonial and capital systems. They assert "we realize that the liberation of all oppressed people necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism and patriarchy" (p. 309). Like the ethics highlighted by Collins, the Combahee River Collective's understanding of Black feminist identity and the commitments it requires necessitates an ethic that asks those engaged in the work of Black feminism to consider the lived, embodied, and material conditions of Black women. With this, they not only recognize the ways in which colonial and capitalist systems marginalize groups like Black women, but they forward the notion that Black feminist scholars and practitioners must actively work and theorize in ways that support 'equal distributions of material resources' among Black women and various marginalized groups (p. 309). In a dissertation study that seeks understanding in how Black feminist scholars both come to and navigate ethics in digital research, considering an ethics of this kind makes room to inquire into the moments where institutional logics, powers, and gains -- particularly those that come out of academic research institutions -- either bump against researchers more personal and cultural senses of ethics or creates a pathway for them to strategically support the digital users and communities they engage. Thus, within a Black feminist digital methodology, this larger definition of ethics is useful because it can be used to locate moments where cultural and embodied knowledge in the digital research process becomes more valuable, ethical, critical, and dependable than various institutional logics and technological processes. It also makes room to see where and how research practices might be developed that work from a place of resistance. Therefore a bulk of this study -- which ultimately seeks to both prioritize and locate Black feminist ethical digital

practices -- provides space and time for Black women digital researchers to reflect on their identities, their research experiences, their senses of ethics, and (more generally) their enactments of ethics during their digital research projects..

How Digital Ethical Commonplaces Shape My Methodological Framing

For digital researchers who work with Black and multiple-marginalized research participants, there is great importance in developing and utilizing research methodologies that place a priority on ethics. To ensure that ethical concerns are not only being explored but also addressed in my work, my methodological approach develops--and immediately responds to--four specific commonplaces in digital ethics that Black feminism can directly and adequately address. These commonplaces can be outlined as follows: 1) there is a need for digital methodologies in writing studies-related fields that specifically center ethics, inclusion, and justice (Del Hierro and Vankooten, 2020), 2) there is a need to address and redress digital research practices that develop out of ideas around digital (dis)embodiment (Dadas, 2018; Mckoy et al., 2022), 3) there is a need for more positional work in aims of rejecting objectivity in digital research (Bailey, 2011; Mckoy et al., 2022), and 4) there is a need for more articulations of what antiquates protection and harm in digital research (Adkins, 2018).

These ethical commonplaces play a large role in the development of this study -- particularly because they all have deeply influenced my application of Black feminist theory in developing research questions, selecting participants, and gathering, analyzing, and reporting data. Because Black feminism is an area of thought that centers Black women's bodies, knowledges, lives, and experiences in order to liberate and create transformative, sustaining, justice-based practice, its application -- especially in in response to the aforementioned ethical commonplaces -- fits within the context of my aims and goals for this work. In the next section, I

describe in more detail how a Black feminist ethic can work to address the issues that continue to reveal themselves in the writing-studies related fields and digital research in general.

On the Exclusion of Black Feminist Thought in Developing Digital Research Methods and Ethics

While there are multiple theories and methodological frameworks that explicitly address ethics in digital writing and digital communication research (e.g., queer (Dadas 2016), feminist (Adkins 2018), and decolonial (Haas 2012), writing studies-related fields are in desperate need of developing digital methodologies that foreground concepts like social justice and ethics (VanKooten and Del Hierro 2020). One area of thought that remains underdeveloped in conversations around digital methodology and ethics -- as previously mentioned -- is Black feminist theory. Now, this is not to say that there are no scholars who do the work of studying how Black women and Black publics occupy and navigate digital environments (Noble, 2018; Brock, 2020; Steele; 2021; Benjamin 2019a, Sawyer; 2018). I also will not ignore or negate the fact that there are plenty of scholars in writing studies-related fields who center Black women and Black feminism in their digital scholarship (Kynard, 2010; Florini, 2014; Sawyer, 2018; Duthely, 2017). For instance, Duthely's (2017) article "Black Feminist Hip Hop Rhetorics and the Digital Public Sphere" does amazing work in using ideas pertaining to Black digital feminism to think critically around the development of Black resistance rhetorics (e.g., hip hop counterstorytelling) in composition classrooms. In a similar fashion, Florini (2014) studies the impact of Black American cultural and oral traditions through Twitter communication and digital user identity. These works in particular are only two of the many examples of how Black feminist thought is applied and situated within digital writing research. However, when it comes to the development of digital methodology that outlines specific methods, procedures, and

considerations for approaching digital writing research processes, few people --if any-- have explicitly named Black feminism as a lens by which those of us in the field might further sculpt ethical, digital practice.

History and scholarship in writing studies-related fields show that when it comes to research around Black digital users and their complex relationships with technology, the contributions of Black women and Black people are often either left out of conversations altogether due to issues of education and access (Banks, 2006); we also have a tendency to be presented as a data limitation through concepts like the digital divide[5] (Steele, 2021). This kind of presentation does an immediate and massive disservice to Black women and Black people as well as the contributions that we have made to technological use and development over time. As communication scholar Catherine Knight Steele writes in her book *Digital Black Feminism*, "Black women's technological capability and their utility of online platforms [and] crafting [of] intentional discourses of resistance are predicated upon a historically unique position of having to exist in multiple worlds, manipulate various technologies, and maximize their resources" (p. 5). Given that Black women have an extensive history of adapting to on-going cultural, technological, and digital advances, we, very clearly, are a demographic that excels in areas of technological and digital literacy. For this reason, I find that one way to address the ethical commonplace of not having enough digital methodologies that center ethics, inclusion, and justice in the field is to begin building a digital methodology that explicitly centers Black women's experiences and perspectives. The Combahee River Collective wrote that "if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (Combahee River Collective,

[5] The digital divide is a concept and rhetoric that has long implied that "an absence of Black folks in tech." (Steele).

1977, p. 311). To center the experiences of Black women means to employ a digital methodology that is concerned with implementing methods and ethics through an intentional and multifaceted consideration of research practice, focusing primarily on how that practice might impact the digital data, users, and communities engaged. This also aligns with the Black feminist tenet of privileging lived experiences, as the implementation of a methodology and ethic that centers Black women's lived experiences inherently designates those lived experiences as moments of learning via 'criterion of meaning' (Collins, 2014, p. 257). In understanding the Black feminist tenet of valuing lived experience as a building block to developing digital research methodologies, we establish the means to engage in alternative measures of digital research and ethical approach. This forwards what bell hooks (1989) would deem as moving from margin to center -- choosing marginality as "a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance…and [offering] the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create [and] imagine alternative, new worlds" (p. 20). In the next section, I define and explore digital (dis)embodiment as it is important to demonstrate how a Black feminist ethic might counter digital practices that attempt to separate the human from the digital.

On Digital (Dis)Embodiment

There is a long history of writing studies-related scholarship that discusses the study and development of technologies as a deeply embodied process, situating technology as inseparable from race, gender, class, and various other notions of human identity (Kolko et al. 2000; Meloncon, 2004; Arola and Wysocki, 2012; Weheliye, 2014; Brock, 2020). When it comes to digital research -- which I earlier defined as the study and engagement of materials and content created by computational process and human influence — somehow, research processes are still being packaged, presented, and navigated as if the digital environments and data we engage are a

kind of ‘free for all’ across digital, internet, and social media spaces. In discussing the engagement of research around digital activism and technical communication, Dr. Cecilia Shelton shares in the co-authored piece “Embodying Public Feminisms: Collaborative Intersectional Models for Engagement” that “[we as a field] have not spent enough time connecting the lived and embodied experiences of communicators to the methods that they use to communicate” (Mckoy et al., 2022, p. 77). The addressing of this issue reminds those engaged in the field that the digital work we encounter is still very much tied to the bodies that create, share, and organize around it. In talking specifically around the data collection process, Shelton’s words are closely echoed as scholar Tabetha Adkins (2018) suggests that “some scholars may be tempted to think of all Internet data like ‘broadcast media’ that should be treated like a text to be quoted rather than the content of a subject to be protected” (p. 55). Though the internet, social media spaces, and other digital spaces are seen as providing an ample amount of research material, approaching this content without the consideration of the users and communicators who create it creates risk and makes room for harm in a number of unpredictable ways (Adkins, 2018). Additionally, the viewing, handling, and managing of digital data as disembodied artifacts is also explored in Banks and Eble’s (2007) work when they trouble ideas of ‘risk’ and ‘harm’ in relation to digital research participants. Here, Banks and Eble (2007) underscore that there is a need for digital researchers in writing studies-related fields to stop “[assuming] that their research doesn’t necessarily require IRB approval or oversight,” especially when it engages data, users, and communities that exist in various digital spaces, places, and environments (p. 43). When we researchers take on the idea that public digital content is accessible for the simple fact that it’s public and ‘seeable’ with the human eye, we reinscribe to ideas around what I call digital (dis)embodiment.

In areas of technical and professional communication, theories of technological embodiment encompass the idea that "we must move beyond thinking about just the 'thingness' of the technology" (Meloncon, 2004, p. 71); instead, we should be "focusing on the connections, the articulations between the technology, the culture in which the technology is created, and the corresponding uses of the technology" (Meloncon, 2004, p. 71). Digital (dis)embodiment, then, is what I position as being in direct contrast to technological embodiment theory, forwarding the assumption that digital research and digital data are just 'things' to be collected and analyzed -- handled and implemented as though they are disconnected from human bodies and human experience. In detangling digital data from human bodies and human experience, a theory of digital (dis)embodiment might forward the following sentiments:

1) Less consideration of methodical and ethical procedures are needed in digital research because no harm can happen to the non-physical and non-corporeal bodies, users, and communities connected to research,
2) Digital data that is extracted from the internet, social media, and various other tech spaces is public if it is easily accessible, and
3) Digital researchers are not fully required to carefully consider the cultures, bodies, and communities that make up/influence their research data.

Considering the contents of the Chapter 2 and the applied definition of digital in the first chapter, we know that the digital is never separate from the human experience nor is it non-impactful on the bodies and beings that engage it. Therefore, it is imperative that we as digital researchers avoid engaging in practices that support digital (dis)embodiment. Because humans are directly responsible for the creation and advances of digital technologies and, in vice versa, technology is adapted and sustained for human use, navigation, and even control (Benjamin 2019a 2019;

Noble 2018), technology is always and already embodied. Understanding this, the overall implementation of digital research methods and ethics must, too, account for the full-embodiedness of digital research. This is especially so for digital researchers who conduct studies on and around Black women and Black digital publics since these groups are known to use digital technologies to enact their activisms (Gilyard and Banks 2018; Williams 2015; Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Dadas 2018; Shelton, 2019), build community and safe spaces amongst one another (Rapp et al. 2010; Sawyer 2017), and engage in much needed identity work (Brock 2009; Sawyer 2018; Duthely 2017; Boylorn 2013).

Because the utilization of digital technologies by Black women and Black digital publics seemingly work to restore a kind of humanity that overlapping systems of oppression are responsible for attempting to erase, we researchers, too, have to be strategic about how our methods and ethics aid in restoring --and not erasing-- that humanity. One way to avoid engaging in (dis)embodied research practices, specifically in applying Black feminist theory to digital research, is to remain in dialogue with and in close proximity to Black women and Black feminist communities during the digital research process. This more physical and embodied approach to applying methods and ethics in digital research can be supported through Collins' (2014) Black feminist ethic that emphasizes the importance of having ones practices and knowledge claims assessed through dialogue (p. 260). While the idea of remaining in dialogue with Black women during one's digital research is a new concept, the idea of engaging in conversation around digital research to garner new and alternative perspectives on methods and ethics is not new at all. In Banks and Eble's (2007) reflective work around the limitations of IRBs in digital research, the authors mention that in seeking guidance around mitigating risk and harm to digital research participants, Banks consulted Eble who was able to offer an alternative

perspective, as she had experience serving on multiple reviews boards as well as an ethics committees (p. 37). This was a smart and ethically sound decision. This practice, when merged with Black feminist theory, could encourage and persuade scholars taking up digital research to remain in dialogue with Black women and Black feminists engaged in similar work. By remaining in dialogue and in community with Black women and Black feminists, we can address the ethical commonplace of (dis)embodied digital research practice.

In terms of my own work for this study, it is for this very reason that I decided against analyzing the work and projects of Black women scholars in locating Black feminist digital methods and ethics; instead, I decided to conduct a series of interviews. Because Black feminist theory emphasizes dialogue and discussion with Black women in establishing knowledge, I knew that to interview and speak directly Black women scholars about their digital scholarship, methods, and ethics was to be intentional in including the voices and first-hand perspectives of researchers who take up scholarship like mine. This method of incorporating dialogue with Black women creates a humanizing lens and method to see and study my participants, their experiences, their work, as well as gain access to how they encounter and address the ethical issues they face. Since Black feminist methodologies and ethics center issues of identity and personal accountability *and* emphasize a deliberate push against objective research praxis (Collins, 2014), in the next section I discuss the deliberate naming and consideration of one's multiple positions as integral to digital research processes.

Complicating Identity Through Deliberate Positionings of the Self

The third dilemma around digital research -- and research, more generally -- that Black feminist thought can address is complicating the ways in which researchers approach and name their positionalities. We know from earlier in the text that values, ethics, personal identities, and

social orientations are deeply tied to how researchers choose and move forward with their research practices. Often, it is these very orientations that offer rationale to the methods researchers choose as well as how these methods are applied and implicated in the researchers own identity. As previously mentioned, decolonial theories (Cushman, 1996; Haas, 2012), queer theories (Johnson, 2000; Dadas, 2016; Browne and Nash, 2015; Rhodes & Alexander, 2016), and feminist theories (Adkins, 2017; Clark-Parsons & Lingels, 2020; Reyman and Sparby, 2020; Gruwell, 2020) found in writing studies-related fields are good representations of how specific orientations to the world shape researchers commitments in their work. In many of these areas, scholars are intentional about naming their positions. For example, technical communication scholars Jones, Moore, and Walton's (2019) assert that sharing our positionalities helps scholars to 1) [identify] our margins of maneuverability for action in the pursuit of justice (p. 63) and 2) make room for us to "recognize, account for, and hold as true [the] conflicting, contradictory aspects of our own identities (p. 66). While writing studies is seemingly 'ahead of the curve' when it comes to our understanding of how identity directly impacts the research we engage in, there is room to work on how we situate our identities in research, name them, and address the potential positive and negative impacts they might have on our research processes.

In discussing the rejection of objectivity in research processes, Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins (2014) submits that Black feminist research methodologies directly contrast the more "positivist approaches [that researchers take] that allow them to "[follow] strict methodological rules…[and] distance themselves from the values, vested interests, and emotions generated by their class, race, sex, or unique situation" (p. 255). Because Black women largely do not understand their experiences in the world as disconnected from their overlapping, intersecting identities, their research processes tend to echo the embodied knowledge(s) gained

from this reality. Black feminist scholars across fields actively reject the notion of objectivity in research (Taylor 2018; Brown, 2019; Steele, 2021), and this study, too, follows in those footsteps. Additionally, Black feminism is intentional about not only understanding how race, gender, and class impact human experience, but it also encourages a deeper consideration of how our sexualities, capitalist ties, and colonial histories shape our worlds (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Collins, 2014). Black feminism's deliberate centering of multiple aspects of one's identity (i.e., race, class, gender, sexuality, capitalist ties, colonial ties, etc.) provides an alternative lens by which scholars can think about sculpting and naming their positional identities and statements as they approach their research. I offer an example of my own positionality below:

> This dissertation is deeply aware of (and influenced by) my positionality as, a Black feminist, a human, a scholar, a graduate student, and a researcher. I am Black, cis-gendered, bisexual, able-bodied, and woman. I am a Black feminist, studying and continuing the work of my spiritual, activist, and literary aunties and mothers who sought to bring awareness to the predicaments of Black women and worked to center the needs of Black women in their searches for freedom. I come from a working-class community and family in the southeast region of the United States, growing up around cotton and tobacco fields and spending the majority of my youth in trailer parks. Relative to this, my history ties me directly to the West African diaspora, as my ancestors were violently brought to Indigenous American soil as human cargo. I am a nondenominational Christian, a godmommy, an auntie, a student, a teacher, a daughter, a friend, a writer, and a researcher. I engage in research around digital platforms, and I am also a frequent user of such platforms and technologies. I am concerned with ethics in physical and digital

> worlds, and I deeply and unbudgingly believe that listening to (and centering) the perspectives and experiences of Black women can help us largely and intentionally craft a better world. I am a novice in some areas and an expert in others. I am committed to Black liberation in my life and work, yet I am a part of academia. Clearly, there are parts of my identity that align and there are others that conflict. Still, because my identity and overarching positionality impacts the ways I come to, understand, and engage my work, all of these things are important to name.

In the above example, I intentionally take the time to name my race, my gender, my class, my sexuality, my professional and religious institutional affiliations, my colonial history, and a host of other details about myself. All of these things provide those who encounter my research detailed insights into the positions and identities I hold that directly impact the research that I do. While I, too, recognize that everyone encounters the world differently and the naming of some identities and positions may be risky (and even impossible) for a number of personal, cultural, and professional reasons (e.g.., personal safety, lack of ancestral details, etc.), a practice of intentional naming can assist us in not only complicating our identities but in also closely examining where our advantages and limitations in digital research processes reside.

This kind of practice also directly aligns with the third tenet of Black feminism that forwards an ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 2014, p. 264). In discussing the ethic of personal accountability, Collins (2014) recounts a moment where she asked her students to evaluate the character of a Black male scholar who analyzed Black feminism in his work. What she found when she listened to her Black women students was that in their evaluations of the scholars, they began asking questions around "specific details of his life, such as his relationships with Black women, his marital status, and his social class background" (p. 265). In gaining

insight into the more personal moments, places, and spaces of the scholars life, her students were able to make assessments about his ethics in approaching the topic at hand, using the information provided to "assess whether he really cared about his topic…and advancing their knowledge claims about his work" (p. 265). Again, this demonstrates that the information we reveal about ourselves can help us and others to better understand our positions and, in turn, make evaluations around the 'whys' behind our research.

As previously stated, to work out of Black feminist theory is to understand that objectivity must be rejected in all forms of research. For this reason, this study is intentional in naming my own identity as well as the identities of the participants I interviewed. In asking participants questions around their names (which have been anonymized for protection and safety reasons), their research areas and interests, as well as how their passions both shape and impact the digital research they engage in, I was provided with a larger picture of how their full identities shape their perspectives, their application of methods, their personal and embodied ties to the work they do, and their overall research experiences. On an even larger spectrum, I developed the majority of my research questions in ways that allowed my research participants to deeply reflect on their positions as well. This reflection helped me to make assessments about them as humans, their identities as Black women, and their methodologies as digital scholars, and their overall concerns around ethical research praxis. Lastly, I highlight Black feminist ethics around community and care in the next section as a way to think further about 1) how these things can shape our methods and research praxis and 2) continue to protect multiple-marginalized datasets, participants, and groups in digital research.

More Adequately Addressing Community, Care, and Protections in Research

The fourth ethical dilemma lies in a lack of articulations around community, care, and participant protections in digital research. As discussed in the first chapter, digital writing and communication researchers have always been concerned with ethical dilemmas around public vs. private data, participant protection, digital identity, and more (Zimmer 2010; Sidler, 2006; Dadas 2016; Adkins 2018, Gruwell, 2020); however, because Black feminist theory is often not used as a guiding methodological framework for digital ethics in writing studies, certain articulations of community-connectedness, care, and participant protection in lieu of digital research have not been extensively covered. Patricia Collins' (2014) work emphasizes that "because Black women's experiences and ideas [lie]at the core of Black feminist thought, interpreting them requires collaborative leadership among those who participate in the diverse forms that Black women's communities now take" (p. 16). When inserted into conversations around digital research, this articulation of community-connectedness ensures that all knowledge and claims developed around Black women and their respective communities need to be validated through collaboration with those very communities. This, too, addresses ideas around power and knowledge, as 'collaborative leadership among those who participate in diverse…Black women communities' encompasses more than just the Black women scholars who engage similar work. Instead, this should encourage digital researchers taking up work around Black women and multiple-marginalized populations to discuss their knowledge claims with the very populations they study. This is integral in the knowledge-validation process.

In terms of care, Collins (2014) highlights three components of care that summarize how Black women and Black feminists tend to approach the ethic. In giving an overview of all that an ethic of care encompasses, Collins shares the following:

1) An ethic of caring should place emphasis on 'individual uniqueness', framing care as an ethic that should develop out of one's personal experiences and self-expressions (p. 263),
2) An ethic of caring should be concerned with 'the appropriateness of emotions in dialogue' as "emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument" and "heals [a] binary that separates emotion from intellect (p. 263), and
3) An ethic of caring should 'develop the capacity for empathy', as situating care allows for a personal and genuine connection that not only builds relationships, but makes room for people to share their emotions, perspectives, and experiences freely (p. 263).

When applied to digital research, this orientation to care helps to take the self and the data, participants, and communities engaged in research into full consideration. By engaging practices that focus on individual experience, building genuine relationships, and centering emotion, care ethics makes room for the development of a digital research methodology that forwards a strategic and unique building of methods and processes that can adequately fit the needs and purposes of research studies while also caring for those who may be directly impacted by them.

Lastly, when it comes to issues of participant protection in research, though Collins (2014) does not specifically speak of how a research process might be engaged, her work around understanding the matrix of domination proves to be insightful for those thinking about what it means to protect the Black and multiple-marginalized people centered in their research. Collins (2014) defines the matrix of domination as follows:

> The term matrix of domination describes this overall social organization within which intersecting oppression originate, develop, and are contained. In the United States, such domination has occurred through schools, housing, employment, government, and other social institutions that regulate the actual patterns of intersecting oppressions that Black

> women encounter. Just as intersecting oppression takes on historically specific forms that changes in response to human actions…so the shape of domination itself changes. (p. 228)

As Collins (2014) points out here, our understanding of the oppression and harm of Black women and people -- including those situated within Black digital publics -- should shift as our ever-developing worlds around us shift. When it comes to digital technologies, we know that though digital tools and spaces have been successfully utilized by Black women and people to build community (Sawyer, 2018), engage in activism (Shelton, 2019), and do a host of other things, they also have the ability to target, harm and surveil (Noble 2018; Benjamin 2019a; Benjamin 2019b; Gruwell 2020). An example of this is demonstrated through Noble's (2018) study into internet search engines (e.g., Google) where algorithms have historically sexualized Black women and their bodies via search results, "dehumanizing them as commodities, as products, and as objects of sexual gratification" (p. 18). In a world that is inseparable from digital technology, we must understand that the matrix of domination now includes digital tools, technologies, and all of the codes, algorithms, and processes that make them up. Since we know that digital tools and technologies have the capacity to harm Black women and communities due to the bias and racism often encoded into them, digital researchers need to be especially careful of the ways we attend to research methods and various other research processes employed in our work.

Thus, in determining the parameters of what it means to take up community, care, and participant protection in this study, I pull directly from Black feminist methodology in understanding that all of the processes I engage need to be deeply reflective, involved, and communal in nature. In considering all of the concepts explored here, I built this study in ways

that centered on community, ethics, and participant protection. For example, I was deliberate in how it engaged concepts of community as I found myself 1) engaging participants from multiple areas within writing studies, 2) reminding participants via interviews and emails to check in with me if they needed any support from me during the process, and 3) sharing dissertation material closer to the end of the process to ensure I represented participants in the ways they desired.

In terms of care, it is clear that a Black feminist praxis is built upon the understanding we are full humans with full lives. One participant, in particular, agreed to go through with the study but then ended up experiencing loss and was not able to participate. Applying a care ethic in this regard meant allowing this participant to take the time and space she needed without pressuring her to continue with the interview. Additionally, many of the Black women researchers involved had families. Operating and researching with care in this regard meant understanding that who we are outside of the academy largely shapes who we are within it. There were multiple times in the interview process where participants' family members came into the physical space that they were situated during the interviews; some were children simply coming home from school while others were mothers interrupting to ask questions or just share space. To operate from a place of care means to always make room for the merging and presentation of our full selves and lives, no matter how little or much we decide to share.

Lastly, when it comes to protection, my position as a Black woman required that I go a bit above and beyond anonymizing the participants. In addition to going through the IRB process, I made sure to inform participants of the study (i.e. purpose, potential risks, etc.), I made participants aware of all of the ways I was collecting data, and I tried to ensure comfortability among participants -- reminding them that if they had concerns or felt the need to drop out at any time it was absolutely an option. The specific attunement to Black women's well-being and

autonomy is what makes Black feminism as a research methodology so special; it makes room for a fuller analysis of how aspects of community, care, and protection -- regardless of how the research is carried out -- can be implemented. Because Black feminist theory implies that all of these ethical considerations are integral to Black work for a number of social, historical, and political reasons. Therefore, close attention was paid to how I, myself, and others involved in the study attended to concepts of community, care, and protection for ourselves, our work, and our data/research participants. In the following section, I describe my specific research methods for the current study; here, I take the time to detail processes related to areas of participant recruitment, research design, and data collection.

Methods: A Closer Look at Recruitment, Research Design, and Data Collection

As a Black woman and as a scholar, my work continuously develops at the intersection of my personal, professional, and cultural identities -- particularly in the gray spaces or what bell hooks (1989) would deem as the margins. Living at intersections of scholarship and practice that include --but are not necessarily limited to -- Black feminist thought, digital writing, technical and professional communication, and digital ethics), my work 1) addresses that our problem solving around digital ethics must engage and consider that which is not so easy to formulate, document, etc. and 2) my work looks into the consideration and implementation of research practices and methods that "center, privilege, and promote marginalized perspectives" (Jones et al. 2016). My work also aligns with what the Black Technical and Professional Communication Task Force[6] sees as being "unapologetic in centering…Black community and culture as well as [a multitude of] rhetorical practices [that are] inherent in Black lived experience" (McKoy et al.,

[6] In 2020, the Black Technical and Professional Communication (BTPC) Task Force released a position statement "advocating for the inclusion of…practices centered on Black community, [Black] culture, and [Black] rhetorical practice" as integral to conversations in TPC. For more insight on the BTPC Task Force's formation and overall purpose, see Mckoy et al. (2020).

2020). Thus this study -- carried out through a qualitative, multi-method approach -- engages ethical considerations already put forth by Black feminist theorists as well as those who specifically engage in qualitative research, digital research, and research around Black women.

Recruitment

Because this study is intentional in identifying how 1) certain values and research practices develop within specific communal positionings and 2) have the ability to inform community knowledge and praxis, I decided to locate and recruit participants through the use of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling consists of asking participants (and in my case, potential participants) for recommendations on other possible participants who may meet the qualifications of the research study at hand ('Snowball sampling'). In their 2016 study "Ethical Practices and Challenges in Research on Digital and Social Media," information studies scholars Shilton and Sayles (2016) used snowball sampling and citation chaining as a means to find research participants who were "experienced with digital and social media research" (p. 1910). This use of snowball sampling, then, creates a list of potential participants in a way that prioritizes community and networking -- methods that, as previously explored, forward a Black feminist methodology and ethic. Citation chaining, another form of 'snowballing', is a practice by which researchers search both 'backwards and forward' through materials (i.e., articles, books, and other forms of published materials) to identify works related to specific topics ('Citation chaining'). Additionally, in selecting participants to reach out to, I searched through my Twitter profile to identify Black women digital scholars situated in my field of study and/or extremely close to it. Though the practices of snowball sampling and citation chaining aren't specifically grounded in Black feminism, the work of building methods through the engagement of Black woman communities and scholarship (both physical and digital) is. In conversations

around Black womanhood and research participant identity, some Black women scholars find methods built out of the snowballing technique as "critical method(s) of inquiry into hidden, hard-to-reach, and sensitive populations" (Woodley and Locklard, 2016, p. 327). "Within the qualitative toolbox, snowball sampling provides one such way for researchers to study marginalized populations by harnessing the power of social networking and personal connections, which allows for the more thorough analysis of individuals and groups that may otherwise remain inaccessible" (Woodley and Locklard, 2016, p. 322). In identifying Black woman scholars through the work of other Black women as well as searching through my own digital community via Twitter, I further enact a method and ethics that is situated within Black woman and Black feminist research praxis.

Already having possible participants in mind for the study (based solely on my knowledge of their work), I sent a preliminary email invitation to potential participants via the work emails listed on their public curriculum vitaes (CVs). In these emails, I made it clear that the goal of the study was to find Black feminist-identifying digital researchers (ages 18-64) across multiple areas in writing and communication related fields (ex: rhetoric, composition, technical communication, communication studies, etc.) as a means to identifying how Black feminist identity impact digital methodology. While some potential participants did not respond to my emails, I found that many of the initial participants I contacted were more than eager to participate. Within a month's span, I was able to secure six (6) interviewees based on my recruitment methods. Recruited participants were provided a digital consent form to sign as well as provided with the research questions I would pose prior to each interview. Due to some last minute personal and family issues, one interviewee was not able to participate. In response to

this change, I attempted to locate another participant, but after conducting the first five sets of interviews, it was clear that I had more than enough data to continue forward with the study.

Research Design and Data Collection

In securing five (5) research participants, I conducted a series of in-depth and semi-structured interviews as a way to get researchers to discuss 1) how they have learned about and/or come to 'know' about digital research ethics, 2) how they understand their ethical responsibilities through their own work, identities, values, and embodied knowledges, and 3) how they have enacted those responsibilities in their own work. These interviews took place in two (2) phases, with questions around researcher identity and Black feminist methodology coming first and questions around research practice and ethics coming last.

My choice in engaging multiple interviews stems from Seidman (2006) as he posits that interviewing gives researchers the ability to contextualize behaviors as well as the meanings and histories that those behaviors carry. Seidman (2006) also posits that "the primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, the "others" who make up the organization and/or carry out the process" (p. 10). Thus, in looking to uncover the values around Black feminist methods and ethics in digital research, interviewing allowed me more insight into the 'hows' and 'whys' behind the particular personal and methodical choices that my participants make in their research. Further, having access to this information and having the ability to draw connections allows me room as a researcher myself to begin constructing a narrative around digital research communities as well as digital research practices in our field. This application of methods that centers participant experience while also making inquiry into the values, behaviors, and

meanings behind is deeply reflective of the goals and tenets provided through Black feminism (Collins 2014).

The interview process was also deeply informed by, supported, and supplemented with ideas and techniques presented by Black feminist scholars and researchers, particularly because interviewing has been regarded as restorative practice in its ability to both show and explore Black women's full identities. As Few et al. (2003) writes, "Black feminist thought supports the use of qualitative methods…[because] qualitative methods enrich empirical data by highlighting the meanings behind the numbers as well as the cultural distinctions between and within groups" (p. 206-207). In other words, interviewing allows room for Black women to have more time to talk, share with each other, and "be directly involved in the research process through the sharing of analyses and through [the frank] sharing [of] our experiences" (Few at al., p. 207). The idea of interviewing as a restorative, communal, and epistemologically sound practice among Black women has been documented through the work of Black scholars who locate the art of dialogue as essential within Black women communities. In her 2015 article "Inheriting Patricia Hill Collins's Black feminist epistemology," Kristie Dotson lists Collins' four epistemological tenets -- one of which situates dialogue amongst Black women as a 'criterion of assessment -- rendering dialogue as useful in the practice of discovering and/or 'vetting' knowledge (Collins as cited in Dotson 2015, p. 2325). Therefore, one-on-one, dialogue-based interviews with research participants proved to be overwhelmingly helpful in the collection, processing, and analysis of my research data.

As for the interview process itself, interviews took place in two phases, both ranging anywhere between 40 minutes to 1.5 hours. Sharing the questions with participants beforehand, I asked each participant around 7-10 questions during the first interview and around 11-13

questions during the second interview, depending on the direction of the conversation and the responses garnered. The first interview consisted of questions primarily crafted to prompt reflections on researcher identity and Black feminist methodology. The second interview, drawing on similar themes from the first, pivoted in the direction of research practice and ethics. Methodically, this provided space and room for me to make connections between participants' identities, Black feminist values, methodological choices, embodied knowledges, and ethical groundings, and desires for the future -- all of which being the terms I coded my data with. None of the interviews were held in-person due to the covid-19 pandemic; all of the interviews conducted took place via Zoom. Despite mask and gathering restrictions being lifted on state and federal levels, the mode of interviewing here continued the work of community, care, and protection (as discussed in the previous section), ensuring the physical and health safety of participants who are already part of already at-risk communities (CDC, 2022). In addition to Zoom, audio recordings of the interviews were also taken using QuickTime audio player. The combination of these interview methods --based in both visual and sound-- allowed me to be more in tune with participants' embodied reactions and emotions to the questions provided.

Transcription Process

After collecting all of my data, I moved into the transcription phase, using Otter.Ai technology to transcribe each interview. With Otter.Ai, I uploaded the audio files to the transcription database and then spent hours re-listening closely to each interview, editing the digital transcript, taking notes, anonymizing participants based on how much or how little personal information they made me privy to, and (more generally) becoming familiarized with the content. After this, I printed the transcripts, coded them physically through the use of tabs,

colored highlighters, and notes, placed them in a binder, and used the binder as a means of navigating the data.

For protection measures, I omitted the use of research participants' names, institutional affiliations, and numerous details pertaining to ultra-specific areas of expertise in the following chapter. Participants, instead, are identified by pseudonyms allowing me to speak of them and their work rather freely with less risk of harm and exposure. Additionally, all participants had a chance to look over the chapter when it was completed to negotiate how they were represented in the text. In addition to protective measures, my collection of data from the interviews were/are kept on a private external drive, only accessible by pin number. Collected data on participants was **only** shared with them throughout the research process; this, too, helped to ensure that I was protecting participants by accurately representing their ideas and their identities.

One limitation and risk to this research is that because writing studies-related fields (i.e., rhetoric and composition, technical and professional communication, communication studies, etc.) at large do not have an overwhelming amount of Black women scholars, some of the information shared from research participants (for example, their specific research area) could easily make them identifiable. Therefore, in the analysis of this data in the next chapter, specific projects and identifiable factors have been omitted at great lengths. While there remains some information bits that could result in risk of exposure, nothing is included in the following chapter that participants would not want others to know about them.

Distinguishing Codes

In distinguishing codes to analyze data around how Black feminist researchers both come to and enact ethics when engaging in digital research, I pulled from concepts related specifically to Black feminist thought to identify how one’s identity, value system(s), and embodied

knowledges directly inform their methodological choices, ethical groundings, and desires for the future. In coding for researcher identity, Black feminist values, embodied knowledge(s), methodological choices, ethical dilemmas, and desires for the future, I took the printed transcripts and read closely through each interview, using highlighters and marginal notes to distinguish moments, reflections, and quotes that reflect each other following values:

Table 1. Example of data codes, definitions, and examples

Core Themes and Definitions		
Code	*Definition*	*Example*
Researcher Identity (Yellow Highlight)	Aspects of identity (race, class, gender, sexuality, institutional affiliations/positions, ancestry, etc.) that impact or influence participants' work	"As someone from the continent [Africa] who has spent a lot of time outside of the continent, I'm also really intrigued by the nuances of Black identity." - Nadine
Black Feminist Values (Purple Highlight)	A belief or asserted practice/method that directly aligns with Black feminist theory and praxis	"I think one of the things that I value about Black feminism is that it is capacious [and] that it allows for multiplicities." - Amy
Embodied Knowledge (Pink Highlight)	A feeling, worry/hesitation, or bodily reaction that directly interacted with or impacts participants work and research	"It's within me -- something that I don't think anyone can take away from us…I think [a] foundational thing about being a Black feminist researcher is knowing who you are." -Sheree
Methodological Choice (Green Highlight)	A specific practice/method that supplements participants work and research processes	"Qualitative methods, particularly in things like follow up conversations that I would have with my participants…have pushed my research forward in ways that quantitative methods have not." - Tracy
Ethical Dilemma (Blue Highlight)	Identifies tensions with the research process/practice or value systems	"I wanted to make sure it was okay for me to lift that because I wasn't certain the extent to which his intention was to make that very public" - Brenda

Table 1 (cont'd).

Desires for the Future (Orange Highlight)	An explicit hope, desire, wish, want, or need in regards to the future of digital research practice and ethics	"There's a need to be able to create a particular kind of environment to engage with a Black community…[and] there is no nuanced discussion around that whatsoever." - Tracy

Researcher Identity. In coding researcher identity throughout the interviews, I pulled quotes specifically from moments in conversation where participants discussed themselves via race, class, gender, institutional connection, and heritage in relation to how those things influence their research, their work passions, and their methodological and ethical decision-making. Coding in this capacity allowed me to 1) have/provide a fuller view of each participant in relation to how they understood themselves in relation to their work and 2) hold in tension any differences that may arise across participants (specifically in how they see their identities as connected to the digital research they engage in the academy.

Black Feminist Values and Groundings. In coding around Black feminist values and groundings, I highlighted moments in the interview process where my participants specifically mentioned a belief, a practice, or an ethic that directly aligns with values set forth through Black feminist thought. While I was able to draw directly from the work of Patricia Hill Collins and the Combahee River Collective in assessing these values, there were moments when participants acknowledged other Black feminist theorists in lieu of how they took up a particular value, stance, or practice. For that reason, this code encompasses values as related to Black feminism more generally (i.e., considering BF theory outside of just Collins and the CRC).

Embodied Knowledge(s). Coding for embodied knowledge consisted of me identifying the moments in the interview process where research participants identified or storied around feelings, worries, emotions, or other bodily reactions that impacted their research processes in

some capacity. This code was useful in highlighting how Black feminism prioritizes embodied knowledge in ethical decision-making, situating Black women's lived experiences and bodies as an 'criterion of learning' and agent of action.

Methodological Choices. When coding for methodological choices, I highlighted moments in the interview process where participants identified a specific practice or method that they implement in their digital research praxis. Often, these methodological choices are grounded by Black feminist thought; still, there were moments when methods developed outside of Black feminism proved to also sufficiently support researchers project needs. Thus, this code encapsulates the varied methodological decisions researchers make to understand how they choices may work in congruence with each other and (occasionally) create conflict.

Ethical Dilemma. When it comes to ethical dilemmas, this code helps to pinpoint moments in interviewing where participants identified tensions with certain practices, processes, and values encountered in their research processes. This code helped to identify some of the larger concerns of Black women and Black feminists who engage in digital research, making room for a deeper understanding and acknowledgement of the issues/commonplaces that tend to arise as well as how Black feminist knowledge creates room for action as well as the development of alternative research measures.

Desires for the Future. Highlighting moments in the interview where research participants share their desires for the future, this code identifies specific moments in the interview process where participants explicitly set forth a hope, desire, or practice that they believed would significantly impact the digital research process. With this code, I was able to gather data around how Black women and Black feminists imagine the future of digital research as influenced by and through Black feminist values, praxis, and consideration.

In Moving Towards Data Findings and Analysis

When it comes to situating identities and collecting data in digital work, I apply the axiom and concept of "method is ethic" created and utilized by ICT researcher Annette Markham. While Markham (2006) does not ground herself in Black feminist theory, her work can still assist researchers like myself to pinpoint how Black feminist digital researchers' ethical decision-making 'always and already' inform their methodical praxis. In her words, she writes "to say methods first, ethics follows is to emphasize that all methods decisions are in actuality ethics decisions" (Markham, 2006, p. 42-43). For this particular study, I adapt and slightly revise this axiom to say "ethics first, methods follow." While Markham stresses the importance of reflexivity and ethical consideration being embedded in the research process, my stance and methods extend this notion by submitting that our ethics should do the work of intentionally predetermining our methods and prompting us to continuously amend our research plans as needed. To reflect on how our values and positions impact our work is invaluably important, but to center those values and positions -- particularly when maintaining a multiple-marginalized and justice-oriented stance - makes room for us to go beyond critiquing our research processes to developing research that is human-centered and socially just. Our ethics determining our methods requires a commitment to 'doing' in our work that is both on-going and non-resistant to amending --and even halting-- research processes that prove themselves ethically unsound. As I move into the next chapter where I share my findings and provide an analysis to them, I keep this -- as well as the ethical commonplaces mentioned at the beginning of the chapter -- in full mind.

Chapter 4: How Black Women and Black Feminism Can Inform Research Methodology and Ethical Practice

As earlier mentioned, this dissertation examines the experiences of Black women and Black feminist digital researchers in writing studies-related fields to better understand how their values, embodied knowledges, and experiences assist them in making methodological and ethical decisions in their scholarship. Because there are so few guidelines around digital ethics and endless ethical dilemma in digital research, fields like writing studies are concerned with the development of digital methodologies that "foreground phenomena, emphasize ways of knowing, and highlight ethics, inclusion, and justice" (Del Hierro and VanKooten, 2020). Thus, the contents of this chapter will explicitly focus on connections between participants' identities, their Black feminist values, their methodological choices in research, their embodied knowledges, their ethical groundings, and their desires for the future. For protective and ethical measures on my own part as a researcher, I have omitted the use of research participants names, institutional employers, and specific areas of expertise in this chapter. Instead of using this information, I present interviewees in this text with the following pseudonyms: Nadine, Amy, Sheree, Tracy, and Brenda. These pseudonyms were generated at random, allowing me to speak of these women, their experiences, and their work with little-to-no risk of harm and exposure. As previously mentioned, one limitation and risk to this study is that because writing and studies-related fields at large do not have an overwhelming amount of Black women scholars within them, some of the information shared from research participants (e.g., details on specific experiences) could make them identifiable. Still, the presentation and analysis of data in this chapter works hard to omit identifiable information.

Introducing the Participants

As I dive into the findings portion of this study, I first present the interviewees

through their own personal descriptions of themselves. I do so with the intention of presenting these women not just as researchers, but as Black women who understand their work in the academy as inherently tied to their lived experiences. This, too, creates room for readers of this dissertation to understand the multitude of personal, professional, cultural, and embodied moments that made up the interview process. Additionally, presenting data in this way helps readers of this dissertation understand not only how I encountered the participants myself but also in how each interviewee sees and constructs their own personal, cultural, and professional identities. Then, in discussing my findings through the codes I presented in Chapter 3 (see figure 1), I make connections between the experiences of these Black women researchers to further address ethical commonplaces in digital research as well as how Black feminist thought might more directly attend to them. As Patricia Hill Collins (2014) writes, "By taking the core themes of Black women's standpoint and infusing them with new meaning, Black feminist thought can stimulate a new consciousness that utilizes Black women's everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge" (p. 32). Ultimately, this chapter makes room to forefront Black women's knowledge -- personal, cultural, and embodied-- around digital research methodology and ethics in writing studies-related fields.

Introducing Nadine

Nadine is an assistant professor of rhetoric and professional communication, describing her work as a blend of cultural and digital rhetorics.

> I've always been driven to have interest in the way technologies work…There are so many ways that the technology -- at risk to the information that we're sharing, I'm very aware -- provides us access to people in places we wouldn't have access to. So, a lot of

> my research interests are driven by information sharing between communities, misinformation (but cultural information), all kinds of things. (Nadine)

Here, Nadine identifies herself as a scholar concerned very much with the ways that technology shapes personal and cultural experiences for those both in and around her community. In thinking specifically about how her identity impacts and shapes her role as a digital researcher, Nadine also describes herself as someone interested in social media work, concerned with the ways that representations of people, cultures, and communities in digital spaces can push harmful misconceptions of identity despite how nuanced identity can actually be. She shares,

> I think the multiple identities I hold have allowed for me to see, *gosh*, the many misrepresentations of who I am out in the world, either through research, through pop culture, through media…As a researcher I'm hyper aware of just how little folks be knowing about people. Like, the assumption is always 'you're a Black woman' and…that is SO multifaceted. Like, to dilute someone's experience, you know, just by merit of just their color alone is so flawed. Because again, the Black experience is…whew. (Nadine)

As a participant of this study, Nadine's presentation of her own identity and scholarship speak directly to her understanding of digital spaces and technologies as influential to the development of varied personal, cultural, and professional identities as well as the experiences that come from them. Nadine's participation in this study is largely due to her commitment to Black feminism and her work that explores how the work of online communities can be both helpful and harmful to relative physical communities.

Introducing Amy

Amy is an assistant professor of language, writing, and rhetoric, presenting her work as a mix of Black feminism, digital rhetorics, cultural rhetorics, and technical communication. In

going deeper into what drives her work, Amy shares that she's concerned mostly with "how…Black people show up with the ways that we all speak, write, [and] compose" as well as how "that [gets] positioned in social situations, in academic situations, and other kinds of discourse communities." Here Amy presents herself as working and navigating within writing studies more generally, tracing a common thread of Black existence as well as Black writing and communication practices in her scholarship. More specifically, Amy's identity as a digital scholar shows up in her research around the affordances and constraints of digital platforms to those engaging them as a means to support their own personal, cultural, and political work. She describes her research relationship with the digital as being "...interested in what it means for the digital to be the rhetorical context for what we already are doing OR what we need to do." Like Nadine and the other participants in this study, Amy's work makes direct connections between the writing and communication that happens in digital spaces and the human bodies that utilize that writing for their own material, communal, and political needs. In sharing her commitments to her work, she pinpoints her application of Black feminist thought to her research as largely due to the fact that Black feminism is methodical in its very nature -- providing a framework and lens on how to assess one's varied circumstances so that they might go about their life. She reflects the following:

> I'm committed to Black feminism [because] it gave me the language to solve the problems and answer the questions that were in front of me as an educated woman, married to a man, raising [children]…It [gives] me the language to understand these things, speak back to these things, and shape my life in the ways I [want] to. (Amy)

Amy's attention to the digital as rhetorical and her early acknowledgement of Black feminism as a methodological tool for approach research as well as her own life is what qualified her as a candidate for this study.

Introducing Sheree

Sheree is a non-tenure track associate professor of critical race studies, technical and professional communication, as well as Black and African American literature(s). In giving an overview of her work as it relates to the digital, she shares, "I focus on the story…As a researcher, I'm interested in telling the stories of those people who don't get a chance to have their stories often provided in written format, or maybe even oral form either." Sheree's summation of her work pinpoints her as concerned with the ways digital technologies can be utilized or aided in the construction of stories and experiences for people whose voices and narratives tend to go unheard. This direct connection of the digital as having the ability to amplify and shed light to human experience positions Sheree's work as restorative, seeing the digital as a methodical tool that can provide clarity, insight, and evidence of lived experience to all of the spaces, places, and situations that Black people tend to occupy. On a more personal note, Sheree sees a direct connection between her scholarship and Black feminist thought. She outlines her application of Black feminism to her work as follows:

> I do a lot of work with critical race theory, which I believe is super connected to Black feminism…I am an advocate of hard work and promise with a dash of thinking about social justice and making sure that people who are in the [same] spaces I inhabit feel empowered. (Sheree)

Basing her work around concepts of justice and equity, Sheree immediately sees her work as bound to the upliftment of her community, understanding digital technology as helpful in this

process. “My identity is very much bound in the work of Black lives and Black livelihood” (Sheree). Sheree’s participation in the study is accredited to her work in and around Black storying, her use of the digital in the reconstruction of said stories, and her positioning of Black feminist theory and praxis as central to her work.

Introducing Tracy

Tracy is an assistant professor of technical communication and information design. In identifying herself as a humanist and scholar, she enthusiastically shares that her interests lie in “the ways in which speech technologies and devices [replicate] existing barriers to entry and [create] spaces of marginalization in which people of color already exist” (Tracy). In talking more about the design of speech and communication technologies, Tracy makes known that her work interfaces with the digital because developing digital technologies have very specific and insidious ways of disciplining the global Black communities that utilize them. In discussing how she came to her digital work, she shares the following:

> All of a sudden, I found myself thrust in this space of years of how to negotiate communication…with human beings and becoming skilled at it and then getting into [these] digital spaces and recognizing that I can’t negotiate. I get bumped off, I get thrown off, I get misunderstood, I get rerouted, I get shut down, [and] I get disciplined. (Tracy)

Tracy’s work, from her very own description, is directly tied to her embodied experiences and frustrations as a user of digital technology, working within the margins of her identity to address a very real, very discouraging problem that Black digital users often face. While Tracy’s work -- which centers Black experience and forwards a need a for digital and technological

developments that, too, center those experiences -- aligns with the aims and goals of Black feminism, Tracy, herself, does not consider herself a Black feminist. She shares,

> ...[My] resisting the label [of Black feminist] isn't about not wanting to be labeled a digital Black feminist or Black feminist; the resisting of the label is [because] I do not understand the work well enough to claim that I am associated with it. (Tracy)

While Tracy's profession of her non-Black feminist identity sets her apart from all of the other participants, her inclusion in this study is based upon the premise and flexibility that Black feminist work and scholarship provides. In discussing the work of Black feminism and where it can be identified, Patricia Hill Collins once wrote that "Black women's path to a 'feminist consciousness often occurs within the context of antiracist social justice projects, many of them influenced by Black nationalist ideologies…To look for Black feminism by searching for U.S. Black women who self-identify as 'Black feminists' misses the complexity of how a Black feminist practice actually operates" (Collins 1993 as cited in Collins). While Tracy was hesitant --and remains hesitant-- to identify as a Black feminist, her inclusion in this study is representative of the larger goals and aims of Black feminism. Seeing as though her work is situated within a Black digital and social-justice oriented context, I found her contributions to conversations around the digital as critical, needed, and insightful -- especially in thinking through what it might means or non-Black feminist identifying scholars to apply a Black feminist digital methodology to their work down the line.

Introducing Brenda

Brenda is an assistant professor of communication, designating her research as concerned with "race in media, [and] more specifically Black discursive practices and digital/online media." In making connections between her identity and her work as a scholar, Brenda shares that her

research interests developed in response to her developing personal and professional relationships with technology. She reflects on the following:

> I went to school to study things like television and newspapers and thought I was going to do traditional mass media, but [I] was existing in an era where social media was becoming more ubiquitous in our daily life. But the literature at the time broadly excluded Black folks or referred to Black folks as deficient in [our] use of technology. And so the initial driving force for my research agenda was really to just correct the record as it stood…I wanted there to be more Black scholars who loved Black people doing work with Black folks. (Brenda)

This reflection on the relationship between Brenda, her identity as a Black woman, and her identity as a scholar immediately reveals that she sees herself and those who occupy digital spaces as innovators of said spaces and the technologies that drive them. Centering Black women in her work, theory, and praxis, Brenda also sees Black feminism as essential in the shaping of her identity and work. While she directly identifies as a Black feminist, she immediately shares that she aligns herself with the ideas of scholars like Patricia Hill Collins when it comes to Black feminist identity. She shares "I have no issue being labeled as a Black feminist…but I don't know that it's always the most useful premise for us to designate that someone is or isn't" (Brenda). Brenda's orientation to Black feminist identity and work immediately proves itself as committed to intersectional praxis and coalition-building, revealing --just as discussed with Tracy-- that while identity is important, she maintains a belief that Black feminist identity does not always account for the complexities of what Black feminism has the capability to do. Brenda further explains, "[Our grandmothers] would have never called themselves [feminist]...but if we look at what [they] did, then we can learn so much about what it means to embody Black

feminist thought." Brenda's participation in this study, then, is based upon her research interests in communication-based digital technologies as well as her experiences as a Black woman and Black feminist researcher.

As demonstrated throughout all of these participant introductions, the work that these women do in the academy is directly tied to some aspect of how they must navigate the world. This deeply echoes the Black feminist principle of 'the personal is political', as both the Combahee River Collective (1977) and Patricia Hill Collins (2014) see it as the Black woman practice of ever-examining the specific ways Black women and Black people's treatment, lived experiences, and cultural experiences bring clarity to understanding and countering oppression; for Black communities, the personal and political are forever intertwined. Thus, the participants' work and scholarship are always and already rooted in lived experienced, honoring and engaging the Black feminist concepts and value systems explored throughout the previous chapters.

Data Findings

In this next section, I move towards the presentation of my data as it is based on participant interview responses that directly align with the codes outlined in chapter 3. In coding for researcher identity, Black feminist values, embodied knowledge(s), methodological choices, ethical dilemmas, and desires for the future, I work to locate throughlines between researchers and their varied research experiences. This is important because with each of these concepts, I am able to better pinpoint how one's identity, value system(s), and embodied knowledge(s) might inform and impact their overall research praxis and ethics.

On Researcher Identity

When it comes to researcher identity (which is defined as aspects of racial, classed, sexed, institutional, or ancestral identities that that impact or influence participants' work),

multiple participants identified aspects of their more personal identities as directly impactful to their work as digital researchers. Identity not only shapes the kind of work (i.e., the area of study) that the researchers take on in their professions, but it also plays a role in developing researchers' methodologies and overall approaches to said work. For example, during the interview series, Brenda reflects on how her personal and digital identity as well as her social media practices shape her work. In going more into detail on this, Brenda shares the following:

> I'm always online. I'm always on Twitter or TikTok or Instagram. And I'm always thinking about those things in terms of human communication, because I'm a comm scholar. And I think it's really almost impossible for folks who study communication to divorce the mediums and the tools that we use to communicate for what we study. (Brenda)

Brenda's focus on her personal and professional identities as integral to her work shows that her digital research identity is very much connected through the merging of multiple areas of her life. Additionally, Brenda reveals that her identity as a social media user directly impacts the kinds of research she engages in, as she believes that her digital work must engage and be reflective of her own digital practice. This is similar for Nadine as well, as she, too, shares that the connection between her professional work around digitality resides in her own personal and cultural positions. Confirming that her ethnic heritage is deeply grounded in the research that she does, Nadine shares the following:

> I'm from a somewhat displaced community…and so technology is really how we stay tethered….There are so many ways that the technology --at the risk to the information we're sharing, I'm well aware-- provides us access to people in places we wouldn't have access to. (Nadine)

Recognizing her work as directly tied to the ways in which she and her community are able to utilize digital and technical tools to stay connected, Nadine's researcher identity is developed by and through her lived experiences as well as her proximity to the communities she holds near and dear to her heart. Her work, as a response to this, merges conversations of the digital with the more personal, embodied experiences that develop at the crux of her cultural and professional identities.

Similar to this, Sheree locates her professional identity as a digital researcher as connected to her culture and community through family and ancestry. In sharing how her passions in life drive her work, Sheree submits, "I'm really rooted in my ancestry and my family values, which is really tied up and bound in Blackness and [in] conversations about honoring [those things], which I think speaks to ethics." Going even further into conversations around the impact of personal and cultural identities has on research identity, Sheree forwards that the honoring practices located in her culture have deeply impacted how she understands her ethical obligations in the research process. This influence of the personal and the cultural on the professional is a throughline between the majority of the participants.

Tracy, though moving away from racial, ethnic, and the more personal identities, shares another example of how aspects of identity -- in this case, her training and professional identity -- impact and influence the work she does around digital research. Focusing on the applications of methods and methodology she employs in her research, Tracy shares how her schooling shaped both her research praxis and identity as a digital scholar. "I actually do a lot of quantitative work -- experiments -- which I think…is going to lead us into issues of ethics…I think it's important to reiterate that I was trained at a STEM school…" (Tracy). Forwarding that her field training is directly related to how she approaches research and the ethics that arise within it, Tracy

acknowledges that the shaping of her institutional identity largely impacts her work, her methods, and ultimately the experiences around her digital research praxis.

Through race, community ties, ancestry and heritage, and institutional positioning, all of these women identified multiple times throughout the interview process that how they understood their experiences as digital researchers has been largely shaped by their multiple and often overlapping identities as humans, Black women, Black community members, and users of the technologies they study. Even more interesting, all of these women connected their personal identities (and the practices developed through them) to ethics, indicating that one directly impacts the other. This centering of the personal, cultural, and professional in researcher identity makes room to more deeply connect how the values systems located in them all inevitably merge, creating orientations to digital research that not only center the multiple aspects of one's identity but also prioritizes the knowledge(s) that develop out of them.

On Black Feminist Values

Throughout the interviews, there were numerous moments when participants asserted a belief, practice, or research method that either aligned with or directly engaged Black feminist theory. In drawing connections directly between Black feminist values (i.e., a belief or asserted practice/method that directly aligns with Black feminist theory and praxis) and participants research practice, we see how the two continuously inform each other. For example, in sharing that she applies an ethics of care to her research, Nadine positions her application of ethics as 'more than just outlining' and says, "I think [Black feminism] envelops everything I do with a deeper care." In this, Nadine shares that her centering of an ethics of care in her research is intentional and is used to make assessments about participant protection as well as how she might be able to 'shift the dynamics of power' in her research situations. Nadine's Black feminist

values show up through the methodologies she employs which, in turn, work to establish the ethics that develop her work.

Similar to Nadine, Brenda's Black feminist values also show up in the ways she goes about her research. In discussing what she feels constitutes good, ethical research, Brenda reveals that her Black feminist orientation does not lend itself to positivism. She shares the following:

> I do not believe in objective research…I don't take a positivist approach to my work. I respect those who do, but I also challenge them in so much as I think that all of our identities are connected to at least --at the very least-- of what we choose to study and what we find valuable and where we see sources of knowledge. (Brenda)

Brenda's views around avoiding objectivity in her work directly align with Black feminism's avoidance of positivist ways of conducting research (Collins, 2014). In this regard, Brenda's values translate directly into her research methodology, outlining practices and ethics that allow her to more effectively engage in the kind of research practices she sees fit.

In reflecting on Black women and Black feminists whose work she admires, Sheree posits that a bulk of Black women's work makes things better for not only themselves, but for others. She forwards, "I think, in many ways…[Black women] create spaces and do things that allow us to make something better or make it more accessible" (Sheree). Unsurprisingly, this value around the work of Black women making things better for the collective is a value and ethical sentiment found across multiple Black feminist theoretical and practical texts (Combahee River Collective; 1977; Collins, 2014). Directly connecting to what Collins (2014) outlines as an ethic of care and an ethic of accountability, Black women's work situates personal expressiveness, empathy, and emotion as critical components in understanding one's responsibility to the self and others (Collins, 2014, p. 266). For this reason, there is a Black

feminist value around working in ways that benefit the collective. This idea reappears through Amy and Tracy's values as well.

With Amy and Tracy, both women inherently saw Black feminist values in the digital research process as concerned with the community. In discussing how Black feminist thought shapes her decision-making in digital research, Amy shares,

> I genuinely believe that lived experience is a valuable kind of evidence. And I genuinely believe that a collaborative and a community-centered approach to meaning-making is important. I genuinely believe in embodied meaning-making in practice. What happens to people's material lives and bodies matters. (Amy)

Amy's emphasis on lived experience, community-centered approach, and embodied meaning-making are a direct reflection of her values as a researcher. These values, as later revealed in the interview series, also help Amy make decisions around how to address research harm and other ethical research matters.

With Tracy, although she shares that she does not identify as a Black feminist, the values that she holds around community are central to varied areas of Black feminist thought and are appealing, enriching, and necessary to conversations around digital research. In thinking more around what constitutes ethical research, she shares the following:

> I am more and more convinced that this work must be done in partnership with the community -- that I am not merely describing practices, but I am advocating for the building of platforms…It has to be that I am not doing research for research's sake, that I am not out here describing patterns and observing behaviors [but] that I am working with community to see what it is you need. (Tracy)

As shown, traces of Black feminist value systems appeared across all of these participants interviews -- even with the one participant (Tracy) who does not directly identify as a Black feminist. This demonstrates just how much Black feminist thought informs values which, in turn, also works to inform research praxis and ethics. For the majority of these women, they -- without hesitation -- talked through Black feminist values in direct correlation with their methods, demonstrating just how much one develops both from and with the other.

On Embodied Knowledge

Throughout the interview series, there were multiple moments where participants were able to identify and recount feelings, worries, and bodily reactions in the digital research process that assisted them in identifying an issue, solving an issue, or impacting how they went about their research more generally. In reflecting on a digital project previously taken up, Nadine shares a moment where her embodied response to the data she collected played a major role in her choice to avoid sharing her findings with academic publics. She states,

> I found myself as a researcher being granted a position of trust, because I am a member of that community. And so the interviews that I conducted were very raw, very real, very personal. And [I collected] data that …I felt wasn't for the world to know. (Nadine)

In this moment, Nadine used her embodied knowledge to help her make a decision about the research she was taking up. This moment in her research process was crucial and attests to Black women's acceptance of emotion as a valid form of meaning-making. This meaning-making shows up, too, when Amy mentions discernment as a means to understand the risks of digital research that is tied to the academy. In sharing that Black digital publics are often intentional in gatekeeping, even if discourses 'appear' to be in plain sight, Amy forwards her thoughts on navigating methodical choices in the research process:

> ...I've come to understand that sometimes darkness or cloak or cover is good, is safer, is better, is intentional, is necessary…So I can't live in academic Candyland. I have to live in the real world-land and be able to --I mean, this is not a very academic word; this is more of a churchy word--but discern the difference. (Amy)

Ascribing the word 'discernment' to Black spiritual traditions while affirming her application of it to her research, Amy suggests that digital researchers who have insight to these kinds of cultural knowledge(s) need to use them to their advantage. Because Black feminist traditions and Black spiritual traditions value the use of emotion as a way to make meaning in the world, the use of one's body, feelings, and especially hesitancies, as Amy and Nadine prove thus far, is a useful tool for determining how -- or even if-- certain types of scholarship needs to take place. Pulling, too, from Black spiritual traditions, Brenda identifies 'hope' as a tool worth exploring and utilizing more in digital research practice.

> I was raised in the church, and I think hope is [a] powerful too. And so I remain really hopeful about the possibilities of how Black feminist thought will change the world for the better because I think that it's a requirement for us to hold that hope in order to do the work that we do. (Brenda)

Brenda's discussion of how she envisions a Black feminist ethic shifting the work of digital research, like the other women, relies on knowledge developed internally -- through body just as much as spirit. This attunement to the body in decision-making provides a means for digital researchers to make assessments around their work and forwards that even in working with the digital, the body is never really detached from one's decision-making.

Lastly, in discussing her use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in her research, Tracy reflects directly on how each application of methods make her feel. She shares,

> ...The quantitative methods feel methodical. It feels vigorous. It feels verifiable. The stories, [they] feel like connection. They feel honest. They feel real to me. And I am wrestling with how do I continue to engage [with them both]. I think both are useful. (Tracy)

As previously discussed, Tracy's identity as a Black woman in STEM is a large factor in the development of research identity. Trained initially in quantitative methods, Tracy's interest in and use of qualitative methods have recently allowed her to make assessments around her data (i.e., the humans and human experiences located in her work) that she normally would not have been able to make. Hence, this feeling that Tracy identifies is important because she finds it challenging her to rethink her research practices in ways that restore and center the lived experiences and humanity of those behind her data. Ultimately, this work of reinscribing humanity and agency to specific at-risk populations -- and in this case, to digital research participants, data, and communities -- are concepts inherent to Black feminist thought.

On Methodological Choice

When it comes to digital research methodology, a majority of the participants in this study mentioned and discussed in-detail some of the specific practices and methods that they employ when engaged in digital research projects. Some of these practices and methods were directly tied to Black feminist thought; some were not. They all, however, were developed in tandem with the researchers identity and research values which makes room for a larger discussion around the direct connection between methods and ethics, a conversation already taking place in some internet communication fields (Markham, 2006). Multiple methods also were tied explicitly to practices that aimed to reduce harm. For example, in sharing details around a digital project she conducted, Amy shares that one of the ways she minimized risks of

harm and exposure across her digital datasets was to repeat some of the examples she used. She explains as follows:

> I was not at a place where I could stop and go get consent from everybody. My dataset was beyond the scope of what was manageable to do that. So I decided…instead of using different examples for everything that I wanted to talk about, as much as I could, I would duplicate examples to minimize the number of people that I [potentially] exposed. So, if an example worked for multiple things, to illustrate multiple things I'd just use that over and over again. (Amy)

Amy realized the potential harm that could come from her gathering large amounts of internet and social media data on both public figures and not-so-public figures, and developed what she considers to be a short-term solution to the problem at hand. Though still not completely satisfied with this method because of the risky nature that is digital research, this single method came about after a moment of pause and reconsideration where Amy reflected on the goals of her work and the timeline by which she needed to have her work done. Ultimately, her choice in method came after realizing that she needed to work from a place where she could center the humans behind the digital data and communities she engaged. Her creation and implementation of this practice took into account multiple aspects of her research situation.

In sharing some of her preferred digital research methods that, too, make room for the consideration of multiple aspects of the research situation, Brenda identifies Andre Brock's critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) as a research method and framing that she finds extremely useful in her work. In describing the benefit of Brock's work, Brenda states the following:

> CTDA allows for you to think about interface alongside content and context, which I think is really critical and important not just to being a digital scholar, but also to doing service to Black feminist thought in ethos…I think the context in which this kind of communication happens really matters for us to parse through what things are meant to be public and what things are not. (Brenda)

Brenda's identification of Brock's CTDA immediately reveals that her application of methods are doing two things simultaneously: 1) privileging Black thought and knowledge practice in the research process and 2) taking into consideration ethical issues of public vs. private data in digital research domains. Here again, we see the researchers values around their work directly impacting the methods they employ, sculpting conversations of ethics as always and already embedded in one's research praxis. This kind of consideration shows up in Sheree's responses as well, as her work in the digital archives pushes her to focus on the content, context, and authorhood of the documents that she peruses through in her work.

Sheree identifies narrative inquiry as a method she applies as part of her research methodology and praxis, finding immense value in being able to use storying as a means of drawing connections between writing documents and the humans who develop them. She reflects, "I think also considering [the] audience and really, really honing in on how with narrative inquiry, *who* a person was writing to matters a great deal. And how the narrative was constructed [matters] as well" (Sheree). In addition to this, Sheree identifies critical race theory as a methodological framing that she often engages in her work. She shares, "...The portion of critical race theory that I like to focus on is…storytelling. Like, how can people --minoritized people--tell more of who they are or give you more information about who they are?" (Sheree). Sheree's attention and use of methods that work to restore personhood agency to the

marginalized humans and communities both embedded in and impacted by her research reveals an intentional awareness of the interconnected nature of the digital and the embodied. Sheree's application of method, in response to this awareness, works to honor both.

In sharing concepts that keep her grounded in her research and scholarship more generally, Nadine directly points towards Patricia Hill Collins' work as supplemental to her work in a number of ways. "Much of my methods and metric methodologies were built around Hill Collins' 'Black feminist dimensions.' I think they are something I always come back to" (Nadine). For clarity, Patricia Hill Collins' Black feminist dimensions refer specifically to the Black feminist tenets discussed in earlier chapters that situate Black feminist ethics as concerned with the acceptance of Black women's lived experience as a criterion of learning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethics of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 2014). Centering these dimensions in the development of her digital research methodology, Nadine --like numerous others in this study-- immediately situated Black feminist knowledge practice as central to how she understands her responsibilities in engaging research around multiple-marginalized populations. These Black feminist knowledge practices, then, become the metric of how Nadine conceptualizes her research agenda and carries it out.

Regardless of whether they explicitly developed their methodologies through Black feminism or not, the overwhelming majority were oriented to their research processes in ways that were not only concerned with the safety of the humans and communities behind the data they collected, but they also actively worked in ways that address potential harms and resisted research uncritical research measure that would perpetuate them. Worth mentioning in this is that of all of the researchers discussed in this section, each one's digital datasets revolved specifically around Black women and Black digital publics. The centering and concern for the well being of

these groups in the development and implementation of research methodology, then, is reflected in a larger commitment around the betterment of already at-risk populations, particularly those known to ongoingly navigate multiple identities and overlapping oppressions.

On Ethical Dilemma

In regards to ethical dilemma (i.e., identified tensions with research processes, practices, or value systems), every single participant was able to recount and discuss a tension or dilemma that developed in their digital research process that was either directly related to the vulnerability of the people and groups they studied or was concerned with how the groups would be impacted long-term by their work. In terms of vulnerability and harm, Nadine, Amy, Tracy, and Brenda all identified moments in their research endeavors where they recognized a potential vulnerability which led them to either 1) identify gaps in conversations around digital research ethics that require further exploration or 2) question what it means for researchers to engage in research around multiple-marginalized populations. When discussing her research around women in her own community, Nadine shares that insider/outsider dichotomies often used in conversations around research ethics --particularly in determining 'who' can study 'what' -- are not as easy to implement as some may think. She reflects the following:

> I learned things about women that research-wise could be beneficial to understand, but [I] knew it could be harmful for these women to share…I learned that [with] the insider/outsider research response, being an insider isn't always the best because sometimes you 'get' too much. And then you have to contend with what that looks like, what that means, etc. (Nadine)

In personal and culturally understanding the positions and predicaments of her research participants, Nadine's ethical dilemmas arose as she reflected on how her work could potentially

open doors for harm depending on the sensitivity of the data she collected. Even with anonymization practices, she still felt it to be too risky to publish the article she wrote because of the potential negative impacts that could come about if her research participants were somehow identified through her work. While she has no solution to the ethical dilemma at hand and her scholarship remains unpublished, she continues her commitment to the safety of the communities and publics she centers in her work and continues to critically think around what safe research practice looks like not only for herself but for those who lived experiences remain embedded in her scholarship.

In thinking on a previous digital project, Amy, too, shares an ethical dilemma she encountered when asking herself if she was potentially "making a vulnerable person more vulnerable" by engaging in a social media-based writing research project. In seeking advice from her dissertation committee on the issue at hand, she reflects the following:

> And you know, my committee was just like 'it's okay because it's publicly available and you don't need an IRB' but…what that brought me to is 'ah, these institutions and their standards are not --cannot be--the metric for my ethical commitments in research'. IRB is what is going to protect this institution. IRB is a minimum. A barest of bones minimum standard. (Amy)

Here Amy presents another ethical dilemma, positioning herself as responsible for her research in ways that institutions often do not account for. While IRBs are useful and digital researchers who aren't required to submit their scholarship to them should absolutely still do so to ensure they follow ethical guidelines, often institutions are far behind in determining what constitutes harm in digital environments. Because these spaces are constantly in flux, it is sometimes difficult to build parameters around what practices digital researchers should engage versus those

they should avoid. Still, when engaged in research around Black and multiple-marginalized groups, it is essential that digital researchers seek knowledge outside the institutions they are attached to. In this case, Amy does both. When her dissertation committee encouraged her to move forward with her project, she relied on her feelings, thus positioning her embodied knowledge as a Black as being as credible in her decision-making process. This then led to her modifying some of the methods she employed, creating room for her ethics to be driven through a resistance to research practice that fails to consider the humans behind the digital data she works with.

While Amy was able to tap into her Black feminist ethic of care and center her embodied knowledge as a means to create resolution to the ethical dilemma she faced, Tracy finds herself still in a place of questioning, hoping to find resolution to her own ethical dilemmas as she continuously reexamines her research methodology and praxis. In sharing the potential impacts on her published scholarship, Tracy shares a worry that she constantly finds herself coming back to. She poses a question to herself and proceeds to reflect the following:

> What does it mean for my work to teach the institutions how to navigate Black language? What am I exposing the Black community to by my work? I am torn about [this question], and I have no resolution for it. (Tracy)

Similar to this sentiment, Brenda, too, reveals that she is wrestling with the risk of communal harm via exposure. In discussing her interests and major ethical concerns around the study of private online spaces, she shares the following:

> I'm trying to figure out ethically if it's something that I can do or if I need to partner with the folks who are doing that [kind of work] themselves in order to do so. I haven't started

> [my] project yet because I think it's going to require a lot more thinking on my part before I feel comfortable entering that kind of environment. (Brenda)

Both of these women --one already in the process of publishing and the other prior to -- bring up issues of privacy as related to the Black digital communities they engage. While these women are clearly concerned with issues of public vs. private, there is another dimension of public and private being addressed here. Outside of research, Black communities in general have a history of developing survival tools (e.g., Black language) that protect themselves from the harm of violent, white supremacist systems that function in both discretion and in plain sight (Rickford and Rickford, 2000). The ethical dilemma and concern that both of these women speak of engages a long history of Black populations and publics whose safety depends on gatekeeping, adding layers to conversations of public and privacy that have yet to adequately be explored in areas of digital research ethics. While neither researcher was able to identify specific methods or solutions that speak to their work, the acknowledgement of the issue alone makes room for more conversations around development in digital research methodology. Specifically, it makes room for the privileging of Black knowledge and community values in digital research, as it is only from these areas that adequate solutions or methods may be proposed or developed.

With Sheree, though her ethical concerns were not based around issues of vulnerability or exposure, she identified ethical dilemma in her work when she engaged in self-reflection and found herself questioning the public and communal reception of the work she was doing. In discussing tensions with her research projects, she shares,

> I think my tensions come from that kind of [thought] like, 'well, will the community embrace [my work]?' 'Will it be…something that they will be proud to read or to look

> to? …I think a lot of my tension is self-inflicted when it comes to wanting to be a good representative. (Sheree)

Understanding her position both within the academy and as a member of the communities she conducts research around, Sheree recognized that not all work done in the name of Black people and community is accepted as such; Black and multiple-marginalized groups are insistent on validating and accepting knowledge by and through communal effort (Collins, 2014). While she admits to engaging in practices where she shares snippets of her work with people she finds herself in community with, Sheree still admits that she sometimes worries about how her work will be received through the community at large. Part of her feels this is self-inflicted, but the concern she holds around the impacts of her work on members of her community is valid and -- as demonstrated through the concerns of the other participants -- not an isolated experience.

On Desires for the Future

During the interview process, there were a few defining moments where participants shared explicit hopes, desires, or needs in regards to what they feel should take place in the future of digital research practice. To ensure that researchers engage ethical digital research practice around Black and multiple-marginalized communities as well as have the methodological tools in order to support such groups, participants pointed towards a number of practices that they would like to see more integrated in areas of digital research. A few of these practices are participant-centered research design, the inclusion of reflection in IRB submission, community collaboration, extended research trajectories and timelines, and more professional development opportunities around digital research ethics.

Amy, who spent time considering what the future of digital research might hold in terms of participant protections, identified a desire to see people who make up the digital data we collect more engaged in researchers' study designs.

> ...I think that people [should] have participants [help] to design [their research projects]. What is that? Participant-centered research? Process participant design? Something. I'm not sure; for some reason, the language escapes me. But something close to that. I think people participating in the design of projects…fold(s) accountability in. (Amy)

While participant design is a common practice in research for those who maintain values around community and reciprocity (Cushman, 1996; Gruwell, 2019), conversations of participant design in digital research are lacking. The notion that digital research data doesn't have to be approached through collaboration directly ties back to ideas around digital (dis)embodiment theory found in Chapter 3. Despite the often unspoken belief that less consideration of methodical and ethical procedures are needed in digital research, this research participant confirmed that conversations around how to navigate our research situations --with the help and input of the digital participants and communities we engage -- is drastically needed.

In thinking more around the demands of the academy in relation to researchers publishing requirements and trajectories, Tracy forwards the following:

> I'd like to engage in more conversation about how we do this research in the academy, but make sure that it's benefitting the communities that we're trying to uplift…and how do we navigate the demands of the academy [since] we're still researchers and we still have tenure? We still have publication requirements and so. (Tracy)

Here Tracy identifies a need for researchers to not only take the time to ethically pause and consider the ramifications of their work before publishing, but she also pinpoints to the need of

institutional changes around productivity and labor. Because scholars --especially early career researchers-- are expected to produce scholarship at a rigorous pace, those who engage multiple-marginalized communities in their work are pressured to make quick decisions around research and ethics in their work. This proves to be difficult, however, for the simple fact that the majority of the participants in this study are directly tied to their research through a number of their personal and cultural identities and understand the negative impact rushed decisions can have on their collective communities. Tracy's response here speaks to two on-going issues of ethics: 1) the need for 'speed' in terms of publishing scholarship and 2) the pressure on researchers from institutions to engage quickly in practices that require more time, more focus, and more ethical consideration.

In discussing her desires for digital research, Sheree identifies a desire to see more reflection integrated into the process of IRB submission and approval. She forwards the following:

> ...I think more reflection would be good if we're thinking about…asking the researcher -- which I don't think we do. I don't think we get a chance to or we're not prompted to do that kind of work, which is important work to do on the research. We're usually invested in it, it gets done, and then we move on to the next thing. And I don't know if we even get a structured chance to pause and reflect about maybe how it is that we came to that research. (Sheree)

Sheree's assertion here is that because practices like reflection and storytelling are integral to the ways in which Black women and communities make meaning, the incorporation of reflection in IRB processes --specifically around issues of digital ethics--provides researchers with more opportunities to locate dilemma, sit with it, and possibly be able to receive feedback from

reviewers on the matter. If digital researchers were asked to reflect on a number of questions prior to IRB submission that were directly related to ethics, it could be a moment of 'merge' for institutions to begin implementing the knowledge practices that marginalized communities hold around knowledge creation and knowledge validation as well as how those concepts impact research methodology, praxis, and ethics.

In sharing hopes and desires around the future of digital research, Brenda identifies professional development (i.e., training) as a means to address digital scholars whose work primarily centers Black populations and digital publics.

> I don't think we can be reliant on a governing body or institutional board that is managed by white folks. So I think it is our task as Black scholars to do a better job training people. And I just don't mean training Black scholars but I think in training white scholars and other people of color who do research around Black folks. I think that is our task. And it can be unfair all at once, but it is our task and I think it's what I'm really committed to. (Brenda)

In identifying that fields engaged in digital research need more Black people developing research strategy through areas of teaching and professional development, Brenda immediately identifies that knowledge around how to approach ethics concerning Black people and populations must directly come from said people and populations. Understanding the predicament of academia and how much labor is already put on Black bodies within higher education institutions, she realizes that requiring this kind of labor can be unfair to some; this kind of labor can also be unfair for a number of cultural reasons, as institutions already have a bad habit of over-assigning laborious activities like trainings and DEI-related initiatives to Black and multiple-marginalized faculty; still, Brenda forwards that a work and training of this kind can only come from those who

already possess the cultural expertise to push digital researchers to think differently about how they approach and engage their scholarship.

Across the interviews, research participants made explicit connections between their identities, values, embodied knowledge(s), methods, ethics, and their desires for future digital research. Asking the participants questions around identity, Black feminist values, research practice, and ethics, my data findings show positive correlations between almost all of the themes presented, reaffirming that the personal, cultural, and professional identities of Black feminist digital researchers makes room to supplement digital methodologies in the field that are not only helpful but timely and needed. At some point of the interview process, all participants -- even the one participant who did not directly identify with Black feminist identity -- expressed an interest in continuing the work of Black feminism in ways that allow them to reconsider and reapproach their methodologies and ethics from critical and embodied standpoints. This is mainly due to the fact that after having space to share their experiences and reflect on their work, they all realized just how much they already worked from a Black feminist orientation and praxis -- even if they don't explicitly name it. All participants agreed that Black feminism could be useful informing a digital research methodology for writing and communication-related fields. In further exploration into this, the next chapter will draw from key themes and issues presented in the interviews with participants to demonstrate how Black feminism continues to make room for a (re)examination of methods, ethics, and institutional logics in digital writing research.

Chapter 5: Using Black Feminist Perspectives and Knowledge(s) to Revisit Ethical Commonplaces in Digital Research

As discussed in chapter 3, there are four ethical commonplaces in digital research that Black feminist thought has the capacity to address. The four ethical commonplaces in digital research, as identified in Chapter 3, are as follows: 1) there is a need for digital methodologies in writing studies-related fields that specifically center ethics, inclusion, and justice (Del Hierro and VanKooten, 2020), 2) there is a need to address and redress digital research practices that develop out of ideas around digital (dis)embodiment (Dadas, 2018; Mckoy et al., 2022), 3) there is a need for more positional work in aims of rejecting objectivity in digital research (Bailey, 2011; Mckoy et al., 2022), and 4) there is a need for more articulations of what antiquates harm and protection in digital research (Adkins, 2018). Based on the findings in the interview, I have identified a number of practices and methods that not only address these ethical commonplaces but make room for a larger sculpting of Black feminist digital methodology in writing-related fields of study. In addressing these commonplaces, I pull themes directly from data in the findings section, supplementing them with Black feminist theory as articulated through the Combahee River Collective and Patricia Hill Collins. This makes room for readers to more clearly see the potential of digital methodology when informed directly by Black feminist theory. As for the themes and practices located throughout the interview series, I name and explore the following as potential contributions to Black feminist digital research: 1) the act of pause, 2) collaboration and ethical consultation, 3) participant protection through data humanization, 4) steady resistance, and 5) the centering of ultra-vulnerable communities.

On Pause

In discussing the ethics of caring, Collins (2014) writes that an ethics of care "suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the [Black feminist]

knowledge validation process (p. 263). In recounting the moments in interviews where participants used their expressiveness, emotions, and empathy to reflect on a situation or brainstorm amendments to their research processes, there appeared a moment of pause. I define acts of pause as moment(s) in the research process where researchers briefly stopped their work to contend with questions of potential harms that resulted from their methodological choices. Moments of pause also occurred as researchers considered impact(s) on their research through relationality (i.e., researchers pinpointed potential harms by critically assessing how closely connected they were personally and culturally to their research, their data, their participants, and their work institutions). This is illustrated through Nadine's reflections of her position as an 'insider' to her research topic. She shares, "...Being an insider isn't always the best because sometimes you 'get' too much. And then you have to contend with what that looks like, what that means, etc." (Nadine). In deliberately sitting with moments of conflict and tension in their work, multiple participants identified a moment of pause where they sat with numerous questions around their research, using their intuition, emotions, bodily tensions, lived experiences, and cultural knowledge(s) to not only determine potential harm but to consider their next steps.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, As Collins (2014) shares, "…emotion, ethics, and reason are used as interconnected, essential components in assessing knowledge claims" (p. 266). Here, Collins demonstrates the role of the body -- as well as the impacts that external factors have on one's body, emotions, and experiences -- deeply impact knowledge creation and knowledge validation processes. This merging of emotional and intellectual practice 1) positions pause as an ethic and 2) asks the person/scholar/researcher to care about and think about what it means to engage digital research on and around multiple-marginalized people, groups, and spaces. This ethic of pause, when applied to digital research methodology, can work to extend

what technical communication scholars Jones et al. (2016) identify as the 3P's (positionality, privilege, and power) in their antenarrative framework that aims to help move technical communicators and writing studies researchers more largely toward more "inclusivity [in] our research and practice" (p. 212). Pause makes room for researchers to be reflective, reflexive, and ultimately considerate of the ways their very being via position, privilege, and power impacts the work they engage. As the "most radical politics come directly out of our own identity" (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p. 308), pause as an ethic begins the work of centering Black feminist meaning-making in digital research. While pause as an ethic can be identified as a Black feminist ethics of care, it also speaks to Black feminist ethics of accountability -- particularly because pause relies on personal experience, personal responsibility, and personal credibility as central to the formation, assessment, and implementation of ethics (Collins, 2014). This creates room for digital researchers to reapproach their methods, ethics, and research situations from critical and embodied standpoints.

On Collaboration and Ethical Consultation

In sharing and positioning their politics in their official statement, the Combahee River Collective once wrote that in the "process of consciousness-raising…[they] began to recognize the commonality of [their] experiences and, from that [began] sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that [could] change [their] lives and inevitably end [their] oppression" (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p. 307). Across multiple interviews, the practice of community-connectedness reappeared, drawing attention to how much of a necessity it is for Black women and researchers who engage in work around Black publics to be in conversation and community with each other. While Tracy and Brenda expressed explicit desires around wanting to collaborate with other Black women scholars, community members, and digital

researchers who could --through collective efforts-- help to make their research practices more grounded in ethics, Sheree mentioned that this was a practice that she already deeply values and engages in. Whereas Sheree shares that she often "[seeks research] advice from [her] community or people [who] are trusted advisors," Tracy -- in feeling as though her work around African Americans could potentially be harmful since her Black identity is not situated within an African American heritage -- expresses a desire to "partner with an African American [scholar]...[as it] feels like a genuine solution to [her] ethical dilemma." This Black feminist principle of collaboration and ethical consultation in digital research creates a method that directly places value around the "continual examination of [Black feminist] politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism" (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p. 316). It, when applied correctly, can become a rather powerful method and ethic when applied to digital research conversations. As Collins (2014) posits, "…intellectual leadership…requires collaboration among diverse Black women to think through what would constitute Black women's autonomy" (p. 36). Thus, in applying collaborative efforts in digital research processes, the inclusion of Black women both inside and outside of the academy proves to be ethically sound, as Black feminism values all forms of lived experience in the knowledge validation process. This emphasis on collaboration and ethical consultation also makes room for "dialogues associated with ethical, principled coalition building [that] create possibilities for new versions of truth" (Collins, 2014, p. 38). It is worth noting, however, that when simultaneously applying a Black feminist methodology to your research and seeking out collaboration and ethical consultation, it is absolutely necessary and central for Black women to be directly engaged in the processes you take up. It is also necessary for multiple forms of ethical consultations to take place -- including those that center the self. I am reminded of Amy's story of when she encountered an ethical

dilemma in her research and sought out advice from her dissertation committee. She shared the following:

> And, you know, my committee was just kind of like 'It's okay, because [your data] is publicly available you don't need IRB…' But what that brought me to [was] like 'Ah, these institutions and their standards are not -- cannot be -- the metric for my ethical commitments in my research. IRB is what is going to protect this institution. IRB is a minimum, a barest of bare bones minimum standard. And so, in looking ahead I have to think about 'how do I make choices [that] minimize harm to people I am representing?' (Amy)

While her committee was only able to offer her an institutional perspective and solution, Amy found reason to ethically consult herself, prioritizing the uneasy feelings that ultimately led to her revising her research methods. Just as pause is an ethic that centers and privileges Black women's communal and self-knowledge(s), so does the act of remaining in community with Black women, conversing with Black women, and seeking ethical consultations with them.

On Rethinking Digital Participant Protection Through Data Humanization

As previously mentioned in chapter 3, as our worlds shift and become even more connected and inseparable from the digital, our understandings of how digital technologies fit within the matrix of domination must, too, shift. As we research in ways that interrogate digital spaces, places, and contexts, it is imperative that we also continue to understand the ways in which digital technologies fit within the matrix of domination. In Patricia Hill Collins (2014) articulation of the matrix of domination, she contends that it "[involves] structural, disciplinary hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power [that] reappear across…different forms of oppression" (p. 18). As we understand digital environments to be hostile towards Black and

multiple-marginalized groups (Noble, 2018; Benjamin, 2019a; Benjamin, 2019b; Gruwell, 2019; Brock, 2020), there is a need for digital researchers to (re)examine the ways our uses of digital technology can replicate harm towards marginalized groups. Across interviews, multiple participants revealed that they tried to approach their methods in ways that were ethical, employing ethics of care and a number of other measures that they believed could reduce risks of exposure, vulnerability, and harm; still, when they focused on the humans behind the data, they often identified gaps in their processes where they located the potential for harm to be still done. From this, multiple participants revealed that they attempted to engage specific methodical practices that could either address or redress potential harms. For example, Amy's reuse of examples and data during her project as well as Brenda taking the time to go through extra anonymization steps were both practices adapted when the researchers realized potential harm for the humans behind the data and then made the necessary adjustments around it. In sharing her practices around anonymization, Brenda revealed that her use of Andre Brock's CTDA makes room for "to really see the context [of the social media or internet platform] and see the person's relationship with that medium." Practices like this make room to decipher "what texts to quote, what things not to quote, what conversations to engage with, what things to paraphrase, and what things to leave out altogether" (Brenda). The practice of 'humanizing data' and then working to ensure that the humans behind the data were supported and protected directly pinpoints to what the Combahee River Collective (1977) would signify as the "development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that…major systems of oppression are interlocking" (p. 305). Taking the time to consider the potential harms that can come with a lack of protection or an invasion of users privacy (depending on the tools and platforms engaged) creates a lens by which researchers can begin humanizing their data. The only way to rehumanize data is to remember

that digital participants, data, and communities are not (dis)embodied; rather, there are real life humans behind our data who 1) maintain multiple identities in their everyday lives and 2) occupy a number of internet, social media, and digital environments for a multitude of reasons. A prime example of this can be located in Chapter 1 when I provide my personal story on digital ethics, revealing that my (re)orienting humanity to the online data I collected is ultimately what prevented me from moving forward with my project. Therefore, our ethical approaches to our data, participants, and communities as they show up in our work, must, too, account for the identities and lived experiences found throughout them.

On Steady Resistance as a Black Feminist Ethic

"Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community, which allows us to continue our struggle and work" (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p. 308). As resistance to multiple forms of racial, gender, class, sexual, colonial, and capitalist oppression is central to Black feminist theory (Collins, 2014; Combahee River Collective, 1977), to approach digital research with a Black feminist orientation and ethic is to understand that this resistance must not reside in the theory and texts alone. Thus, I locate a theme of steady resistance through the interviews, as multiple participants identified a throughline in their work where their responsibility to digital research and ethics as Black feminist scholars directly correlated to the kinds of unbudged, fixed resistance within their personal lives, their work, their research processes, their teaching pedagogies, and more. In discussing her commitments to Black feminist praxis, Brenda shares the following:

> If one is to call themselves a Black feminist scholar, it's not simply enough that we study Black women or that [Black women are] the focal point of our work, but [it is] that Black women's theories and thoughts and Black non-binary folks' theories and thoughts are

> really at the centerpoint of how we examine and critique things like technology…It's not simply enough to study Black women's practices online -- it's using Black feminist theory to interrogate both the social spaces that people occupy but also the kinds of ideologies that persist because of our tools and our technologies. (Brenda)

As we know, "Black women "resist the hegemonic nature of [White male epistemologies] in order to see, value, and use existing alternative Black feminist ways of knowing" (Collins, 2014, p. 267). One way to enact steady resistance in one's research is to keep Black women's knowledge(s) and standpoints at center. Thus, to resist steadily is to be on-going, working in ways that make room for a host of unsettling(s). In the words of Patricia Hill Collins (2014), "By conserving and re-creating African-influenced cultural production, U.S. Black women participate in this larger "interrogation and resistance" effort…[and] having access to a Black woman's standpoint, especially one dedicated to reproducing African-influenced, gender-specific traditions, is essential" (Collins, 2014, Black feminist thought, p. 206). It is also especially important that in keeping Black women and Black people's standpoints at center, we interrogate not only racial, gendered, classes, and sexed positions of Black women, but it is essential that we also connect "the contemporary economic and political [positions] of Black people" at center as well (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p. 307). In terms of how we go about research, this kind of resistance requires us to reflect on ourselves, identifying and naming our positions in ways that make room for us to locate how we might be deliberate in pressing back against the systems and institutions we are attached to. In our application of digital methods and ethics, this could mean engaging in actions that lead to change in how our fields take up IRBs and processes that can supplement them. It could also mean working towards creating an academic culture where we use the lived experiences, needs, and research around Black women to more critically think

about institutional change around publishing and research deadlines, especially considering --as demonstrate through the interviews-- that Black women researchers tend to take up scholarship that is deeply intertwined with their identities and livelihoods. Steady resistance as a Black feminist ethic makes room for enormous amounts of change; it just take the centering and privileging of Black women to initiate it.

On Centering the Needs of Ultra-Vulnerable Communities

"A combined antiracist and antisexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism" (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p. 307). Here, the Combahee River Collective demonstrates that as their understandings of oppression grew, so did their politics. When it comes to digital research, centering the needs of the most vulnerable is another tracing of ethics as found across multiple interviews. As shown through the interviews, multiple participants reflected on what it means to maintain a Black feminist orientation to digital research and, in turn, were 1) able to identify the methodological and ethical decisions they made as being influenced by Black feminism and 2) vocalize desires in what they would like to see in the future of digital research. For example, in valuing critical reflection and the centering of personal experience, Sheree points to reflective writing as a prime example of a methodological tool that could be supplemental to digital research processes. She shares the following:

> ...I think more reflection would be good…I don't think we get a chance to (or we're not prompted to) do that kind of work. If we even get a structured chance to pause and reflect [on] how it is that we came to that research, what happened [in the research], and what we think about it afterwards…the reflective piece for IRB could be useful. (Sheree)

It is also worth mentioning that because these participants maintained similar identities as the participants, data, and communities they engaged, they were often able to center their own needs in their approaches as well. “When Black women [are] in charge of our own self-definitions…four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology -- lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue, the ethic of personal accountability, and the ethic of caring -- [comes] to the forefront” (p. 266). This makes room, again, for the privilege of practice and knowledge that works to our benefit. Because Black feminist theory views and centers Black women as a multiple-marginalized and ultra vulnerable group, participants engagement of ethics did not come without the consideration of who and what should be centered in their particular research situation. In deliberately seeking to center the people, groups, and communities that could be most impacted most by their work, participants were provided a means to assess their ethical dilemma(s) and begin brainstorming around them. I, too, am reminded of Nadine’s story as well as my own, as both of us --because of our own ultra-vulnerable positions and connections to the digital communities we center in our work-- decided *not* to move forward with and publish our scholarship.

> “Despite the common challenges confronting African-American women as a group, individual Black women neither have identical experiences nor interpret experiences in a similar fashion. The existence of core themes does not mean that African American women respond to these themes in the same way. Differences among individual Black women produce different patterns of experiential knowledge that in turn shape individual reactions to the core themes. (Collins, 2014, p. 27)

While the act of ‘not publishing’ in aims of reducing harm is a single way to center the needs of the most vulnerable communities, it is crucial that we as researchers use our positions and

understandings in the world as a means to forwards ethics that not only work to the ultimate benefit and safety of the people, data, and communities we center in our work, but it is essential that we are also responsible for implementing ethics that bring us peace of mind, peace of body, and peace of soul.

As I used this chapter to explore and analyze my data through explicit connections between Black women and Black feminist identity, values, research experience, and theory, I move towards Chapter 6 with the purpose of outlining the implications for Black feminist work around ethics in years to come. I do this primarily through story, using my experiences and the experiences of my research participants to develop a Black feminist digital methodology and heuristic -- learning from Black women and Black feminism in efforts of expanding and complicating conversations found in areas of digital research, digital methodology, and digital ethics.

Chapter 6: A Beginning Rather Than an Ending: Storying Towards a Black Feminist Digital Research Methodology and Heuristic

As writing studies-related fields look to cultivate digital methodologies that explicitly prioritize concepts rooted in ethics and social justice, it is necessary that we begin considering the work, perspectives, and lived experiences of Black women in our efforts. This dissertation, in response to this need, centers the identities, values, embodied knowledge(s), and experiences of Black women digital researchers as a means to 1) uncover how all of these things impact their research praxis and ethics and 2) begin building a framework that is as explicit in its commitments to ethics as it is dedicated to the protection of those most vulnerable in digital research. As Black feminism has contributed to conversations of research methodology in a number of fields (e.g., bioethics, sociology, media studies, women's studies, etc.) (Cheema et al., 2019; Taylor, 2018; Brown, 2019), the centering of Black women, Black feminists, and Black people as a means to develop digital methodology in writing studies-related fields is a necessity. In working towards this, here is a short recap of this dissertation. In the previous sections, I have worked to do the following:

- Present my own personal story around ethics as impetus for this study,
- Provide an in-depth literature review that traces multiple conversations related to (digital) ethics as it relates to Black people's engagements of technology,
- Provide insights to the Black feminist methodological and ethical framing of this study, and
- Center the experiences of Black women and Black feminist digital researchers as a means of locating how concepts like identity, values, and embodied knowledge directly shape methods and ethics in digital research.

Across all of these chapters, I have advocated for the inclusion of Black feminist thought in areas of digital research through an intentional centering of Black women and Black feminist's personal, cultural, and professional identities. Positioning Black feminist theory as a way to continue building digital methodologies in writing studies-related fields, I make and support a number of claims through Black feminist scholarship and the experiences of Black women and Black feminists in my field. Holding a series of qualitative interviews with five Black women scholars in writing studies and fields closely related to it (i.e., rhetoric, composition, technical and professional communication, and communication), I located themes related to practices of pause, collaboration and ethical consultation, participant protection via data humanization, steady resistance, and communal centering across all interviews -- situating them all as integral towards the understanding of how Black women and Black feminist digital researchers both come to and enact their senses of ethics in their scholarship. Interestingly so, all of these things, provide room for the development of a Black feminist digital research methodology: a framework and set of tools that can revolutionize the ways we think about and navigate ethics in digital research.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the art of critical storytelling holds values not only to Black communities across the globe (Wa Thiong'o 1986; Nur Cooley 2020), but to all who see it as a valid way of making meaning in/of the world around them. As storying provides a means for humans to look within themselves for understanding and use such understanding to make the worlds and communities we are part of better places (Baker-Bell, 2017; Cagle, 2021), I return to the method of storytelling that I engaged in Chapter 1, centering my own knowledges and those revealed through my research participants to expand on Black feminist digital methodology through heuristic-building. In doing so, I primarily use this conclusive chapter to outline the

implications for Black feminist digital work around ethics in years to come. As I utilized critical storytelling in the first chapter to provide rationale for why this work is important and needed, I end this project in a similar way; though, I don't see my work in this chapter as an actual ending. Instead, I see it as a beginning.

Storying Towards a Black Feminist Digital Methodology

As someone who has --for at least the past seven years-- leaned heavily into her Black feminist identity, I immediately knew in sculpting this dissertation study that having a chance to sit down with the women who looked, lived, and believed like me would provide a rich understanding of how Black women not only navigate their worlds but also bring the experiences they gain to their digital research endeavors. As a student, scholar, and researcher concerned with the ways in which Black people navigate a host of digital spaces, tools, and technologies, I will admit that I initially felt overwhelmed in my desires to engage in digital research as a PhD student. Even in taking two methodology courses during the time of my PhD training, I still did not come into contact with conversations around digital research and digital ethics that pulled from the knowledge sets that I regularly operate from. I knew about the on-going relationship between Black people and technology. I knew about the ways that Black people occupy digital space to build community, engage in discourses most relevant to us, and continue the work of resistance within white supremacist systems. But I also knew that our presence online has never really been taken seriously. In my interviews with participants, they all agreed with me on this.

Despite all of us having interests in the digital and despite the overwhelming scholarship that speaks to Black people's relationships with the digital, none of us had actually encountered training that prepared us for research engagements with it. For years, we were all told that we didn't even exist in digital space. Our 'non-presence' was written off as a lack of access and

resources. Yet somehow, those of us interested in the connections between our lived experience and digitality still saw ourselves when the scholarship didn't. This is the problem with digital scholarship (and scholarship in general). So much of how we work to understand and engage technology is built and sustained through whiteness. For someone like me who actively refuses to see herself through a lens of whiteness, I wondered what this meant for my digital scholarship and praxis down the line.

Coming to this project was a way for me to see myself not only as a researcher, but as the most empowered version of a researcher that I could be. In preparation for this study, I thought to myself, "What aspects of my identity keep me accountable to remaining a good human to myself as well as to those who look/live/experience like me?" From this train of thought, I focused in on Black feminism and Black feminist identity as an empowering and ethically sound researcher identity. Thus, my study ensued.

My centering of Black women and Black feminist digital researchers in this study was a decision made early on, as I was determined and excited to hear the perspectives of women who actively sought to empower like me. Because that's what Black feminism does -- it uses Black women's lives and experiences as a tool to not only empower ourselves but all who make the effort to surround us. And I knew that in order to better see myself as an empowered researcher *making* empowering decisions, I would need to invite women who shared some aspect of my identity and were ultimately concerned with making the same impacts that I was. So, I decided to interview five women and wow, did we share stories. We shared good stories, great stories, ugly stories -- everything that you could possibly imagine. And as we made space to discuss our work and research around the digital, we quickly found that one of the main things keeping us all connected was the joy we found in our work. We enjoyed working around our communities. We

enjoyed working around our writing. We enjoyed working around our technologies. Still, because of the bodies that we occupy and the systems that we actively live under, we know that to face harm in the physical is to potentially face harm in the digital; who we are in both of these spaces are never disconnected. But somehow, when it came to our work around the digital, the methods we employed in our research showed us otherwise. The scholarship told us that the two were interconnected; the methods, on the other hand, lent little-to-no concern about that connection. So, in the interviews, we shared our tensions with that. We shared our solutions. We shared our worries. We shared all of these things because we knew that our orientations to the work -- as Black women, as human beings, and digital users -- made room for us to more closely see the ways we honor the digital communities we engage. Through centering. Through consideration. Through humanizing. Through celebration. Through resistance. **All of it** is always relevant.

Because Black women center ourselves and our lived experiences to try and make the world a better place, the centering of Black women in approaching digital research methodology and ethics was a given for me. If I could locate practices that worked for us Black feminists as a collective, I could also potentially locate practices for the field as a collective. At core, this is the kind of coalition work that Black feminism makes room for. Thus, through the interviews with research participants, recurring themes naturally presented themselves. These themes, developed through the examination of Black women's identities, values, bodies, methods, and ethics, revealed themselves as concerned with acts of pause, collaboration, humanization, resistance, and community-centering. Unsurprisingly, all of these acts are directly connected to the collective Black woman experience.

So after all of this, how exactly do I define a Black feminist digital methodology? Well, as the majority of this study does, I define a Black feminist digital methodology through the relationships that Black women have with the digital. I define a Black feminist digital methodology through the centering of Black women. I define a Black feminist digital methodology as the work that Britney Cooper identifies as "remov[ing] the artificial limits [of Black feminism] so that Black feminism can continue loving and seeing values in the lives of Black women and all Black people with no bounds" (p. 19). For a long time, digital technology has been a boundary. To that boundary, I now say "no more."

If we are to work from a Black feminist orientation and standpoint, it is imperative that we honor these themes with the same kinds of regularity, intensity, and intention that Black women do regularly. If you are wondering what this means exactly, let me share this Black woman wisdom with you:

> Black women **pause** because we've faced enough harm to know that we don't want to replicate it. Black women take time to **pause** because we know that we can't go through life any 'ole kind of way. Black women **pause** because this world is always going, always working, always nonstop, and that is not sustainable. Black women **pause** because we care. The same applies to our digital research practice.
>
> Black women **collaborate and consult** with one another because we know that we are stronger and better as a unit. Black women **collaborate and consult** with one another as a means of unsettling and redistributing power. Black women **collaborate and consult** with one another because that's how we validate our knowledge. Black women **collaborate and consult** with one another because we trust each other's judgment. The same applies to our digital research practice.
>
> Black women **humanize** because our ancestors weren't afforded humanity. Black women **humanize** because we, too, often aren't afforded humanity. Black women **humanize** because we know that with dehumanization comes harm. Black women **humanize** because we are human, and that alone is enough. The same applies to our digital research practice.

> Black women **resist** because our survival depends on it. Black women **resist** because we know that resistance brings change. Black women **resist** because we know that if a system doesn't work for one, it won't work for all. Black women **resist** because if we don't nobody will. The same applies to our digital research practice.
>
> Black women **center the needs of the most vulnerable** because we know that to do so makes things better for everybody. Black women **center the needs of the most vulnerable** because we, ourselves, make up an ultra-vulnerable group. Black women **center the needs of the most vulnerable** because it is the ethical thing to do. Black women **center the needs of the most vulnerable** because we want people to center our needs. The same applies to our digital research practice.

Developing A Black Feminist Digital Heuristic: Future Implications

Because all of the aforementioned acts are embedded in Black women's day to day lived experiences, future implications for a Black feminist digital methodology include approaches to digital research that interrogate not only how we digital researchers work around/with technology, but it also works to interrogate how we engage conversations of digitality, methods, and ethics in our classrooms, in our mentoring of digital scholars (especially graduate students and early career scholars), as well as how we engage with digital technologies and spaces (and the people that utilize them) in our daily lives. In other words, a Black feminist digital methodology makes room for the reconsideration and reapproaching of practices across multiple areas of work and expertise. For these reasons, I use these core methodological themes to further develop a Black feminist digital research heuristic in all of the said areas. While this list is not exhaustive, it should provide those interested in applying a Black feminist digital methodology to their work and scholarship with a decent starting point:

Table 2. A Black feminist digital research heuristic with sample questions

Developing A Black Feminist Digital Research Heuristic	
Questions You Might Ask Yourself Around Research	• Am I centering or at least including the perspectives of Black women in my digital research practice?

Table 2 (cont'd).

Questions You Might Ask Yourself Around Research (cont.)	● At what parts of my identity do my ethics develop? ● Do I have room to ask for participant permissions? ● Am I humanizing my data? Is my dataset too large? ● Am I seeking guidance around ethics outside of IRBs? ● Have I considered participant design in my digital research project? ● Am I conducting research with/around the digital tools and platforms I regularly engage with? ● What critical, digital frameworks might I employ in my research? ● Are my considerations of public vs. private accounting for cultural nuances around what constitutes privacy?
Questions You Might Ask Yourself Around Teaching Pedagogy	● Am I assigning texts around digital research that sufficiently explore issues of race and technology? ● Am I assigning texts on digitality and technology specifically by Black women? ● When Black students write around their experiences, will I acknowledge their lived experiences as truth without asking them to supplement it with sources? ● How might I enact an ethics of care in classroom spaces? ● How do I incorporate self-reflective assignments into my curricula? ● Am I providing students with multiple methodological frameworks? Am I teaching a variety of research methods in my courses?
Questions You Might Ask Yourself Around Mentoring/Professional Development	● Am I paying Black women scholars and researchers to hold workshops/trainings and share their knowledge? Am I willing to attend? To listen? ● Am I collaborating with colleagues and students in ways that disrupt and redistribute power? ● Am I sharing resources in ways that disrupt and distribute power? ● What/whose perspectives are lacking in my field/area of study? Where/how might this be improved? ● In what places can I resist within my institution?
Questions You Might Ask Yourself Around Personal Digital Engagements	● When I engage with digital technologies, whose voices am I privileging? ● When I engage with digital technologies and platforms, what are my ethics around space and place? How do I make decisions about where I can engage in discourses and where I should not? ● Do I interact with multiple-marginalized groups in harmful ways in digital spaces?

How a Black Feminist Digital Methodology Might Apply to Research

As shown in Figure 2, applying a Black feminist digital methodology in areas of research might require the researcher to engage in a number of questions around participant protections (e.g., questions around risk and harm, historical and cultural resistance to surveillance, identity, and so on), data humanization, the limitations of IRBs, continued ethical consultation, participant

design, dataset size, research method application, and so forward. As previously discussed through Amy and Brenda's interviews, when considering questions in these areas, they found the time to stop, reflect, and make adjustments to their research practices in ways that ultimately benefited the digital users and communities they engaged in their work. For them, a reconsideration of their research practices resulted in them being able to amend the methods they applied — (re)shaping them in ways that they believed would result in buffered participant protections and (overall) less risk of harm. For Nadine, her reconsideration of her identity in relation to these concepts is what ultimately allowed her to make the decision to not move forward with her research; sometimes, no amount of reflection and reconsideration can resolve the ethical issues that we face in our research. In this regard, the heuristic provided makes rooms for those engaged in digital research to both enact and rely on the five gifts of feminism, moving past uncritical research practice and making room for personal and cultural resistances that transform, improve, and radicalize their research experience.

How a Black Feminist Digital Methodology Might Inform Your Teaching and Mentoring, Professional Development, and Personal Digital Engagements

While the purpose of the dissertation is to provide insights to the ways that Black women's knowledge practices have the ability to transform the way we do digital research, it would be negligent to also not demonstrate the extent of the possibilities that a Black feminist digital research methodology and ethic can have across multiple areas of academic life. For this reason, I forward through the heuristic that the five gifts of Black feminism that help to shape a Black feminist digital research methodology makes room us to examine not only our research practice, but also our teaching and mentoring practices, our professional development, and our personal digital engagements. For example, in Tracy's interview, she asserts that her applications

of both quantitative and qualitative methods make room for a richness in her research practice that allows her to see her data and participants through multiple humanizing angles and lenses. The understanding of multiple methods as a form of data humanization and the recognition of research practice as an area in need of collaboration and support points to a need for development within areas of teaching, mentoring, and professional development. Using the gifts of Black feminism and applying a Black feminist digital methodology to one's research creates a pathway to examine 1) what needs researchers and various practitioners might have and 2) methods for addressing these needs. In this case, examining Tracy's sentiments and application of methods might call for the teaching of numerous methods, avoiding the far-too-common characteristic of fields relying on only a handful of methods to carry out their research practice. Additionally, multiple participants admitted to never being asked by their instructors or colleagues if they were well-equipped, prepared, or supported to do the kind of research that involves Black digital communities and citizens. Though only one comment of many, Brenda exemplifies this through the following statement:

> What I have derived in terms of my own ethical approach to doing digital research is a combination of the ethical guidance I got from qualitative fieldwork, methods classes, and my advisor…[though] my qualitative fieldwork class [had] nothing to do with the digital…I think, unfortunately, we are still way behind in terms of ethical requirements for digital research, because institutions don't actually understand what we're doing still — which is very weird in 2022 to still be saying that. (Brenda)

Brenda's sentiments on the need for more ethical insight through collaboration and institutional support are reflections on her own experience and identity as a researcher that might call for more workshops around how to engage in ethical digital research. It could also work to build

professional development opportunities that foreground community and collaboration on digital projects. As shown, there are many possibilities for betterment and actions when Black women's knowledge and ways of knowing take center in our praxis.

In thinking more-so through areas of personal digital engagement, a Black feminist digital methodology and framework might also stress the need to pause and reconsider how one takes up digital space. In my own story told in Chapter 1, my application of a Black feminist digital methodology — even though I had not named it as such in that moment — consisted of me centering my identity to examine how I fit into a particular online space before engaging in research. Even outside of research, this attunement to the self as well as the needs and desires of communities that take up digital space provide room for digital, internet, and social media users to more critically consider 'where they fit', 'how they fit', and 'if they fit' within certain digital spaces and contexts. Ultimately, all of these things outlined through the heuristic center the perspectives, values, and embodied knowledges of Black women to create practices that (re)examine ourselves, the more ingrained logics we attend to, and ethics in ways that push back against harm on personal, professional, and institutional levels.

In exploring all of these areas, I turn back to the work of Patricia Hill Collins (2012) in grounding that those concerned with Black feminism must push back again positivist and prescriptivist ways of engaging with research (or any other area of academic work, for that matter). I also turn back to the Combahee River Collective (1977) in their assertion that to forward the work of Black feminism is to push back against multiple forms of oppression, including but not limited to raced, gendered, classed, sexual, capitalist, and colonial oppression. I position a Black feminist digital methodology as one that takes up all of these things, recognizing that the personal is indeed political, objectivity is not an option, and ethics go far beyond just

checking things off of a list. A methodology of this kind takes into consideration that how both prepare ourselves, our colleagues, and our students to engage with digital data, citizens, communities, and publics is crucial in how we understand the roles of methods and ethics in our work. For this matter, I encourage those wanting to take up a Black feminist digital methodology to realize that this work is reflexive, reflective, on-going, uncomfortable, and a constant reminder to interrogate your practices wherever and however they may show up. Because a Black feminist digital methodology focuses in on ethics regarding lived experience, community-connectedness, personal accountability, care, all of these should be grounded in your developed practices, forefronting the knowledge that comes out of embodied experience and resisting the more common institutional logics that prove themselves in need of reconsideration, reshaping, and reapproach. Because the five gifts of Black feminism (i.e., pause, collaboration and ethical consultation, data humanization, steady resistance, and centering the needs of the most vulnerable), require us to be more attuned to how we view, handle, and engage our work, they also pose larger questions around how we come to our work, pointing to other areas in our personal and professional lives that may need innovation or amending. When we center Black women and Black feminists' ways of knowing in our work, we make room for growth, resistance, care, and all of the things that ensure marginalized and vulnerable groups are not only better protected but supported in the ways they desire. We make room to ensure that we are doing our part, reducing the gaps for harm and making room for scholarship and practice that is considerate, ethically sound, and justice oriented.

Closing: Honoring Reflections

As noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, this work is about listening to AND learning from Black women. Because the centering of Black women in digital, tech-centered,

and social justice conversations provides complex understandings of how multiple overlapping and intersecting identities construct specific lived experiences, these centering(s) also make room for the development of practices that can provide support in numerous areas of life. During the interview process, there were a handful of Black women intellectuals and figures accredited to have influenced participants' Black feminist ethics, identities, and overall engagement of digital space and scholarships. Because Black women (and Black folks, as a collective) have an extensive history in confronting and resisting systems of oppression by developing spaces and strategies that take on the work of resistance, healing, humanizing, and community, I close this work by honoring and naming few of these women: Audrey Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Filomena Steady, Yomaira Figueroa, Natasha Jones, April Baker Bell, Brittany Cooper, Sojourner Truth, Joan Morgan, Beverly Sheftall, Kristie Dotson, Safiya Umoja Noble, Ruha Benjamin, Toni Cade Bambara, Moya Bailey, Alice Walker, Aja Y. Martinez, Ida B. Wells, Rochelle Brock, and Barbara Smith.

To Nadine, Tracy, Brenda, Sheree, and Amy: Thank you.

My inquiries, my ideas, my feelings, and all of the things that drove this study were confirmed and validated in the moments I sat down with each of the research participants who agreed to do this study. I honor each interviewee for the knowledge and time they shared with me. I am deeply appreciative of how you all brought your full selves and bodies into those Zoom spaces. It would not have mattered if our interviews were in-person or not; the warmth, concern, passion, and care I felt in each interview was only but a testament to the kind of warmth, concern, passion, and care that Black women (as well as Black women's bodies, thoughts, theories, and experiences) can bring to conversations around digital research. It was the lightheartedness, the

heaviness, the smiles, the tears, and all of the Black woman moments of ‘girl yes, I feel you’ that let me know we have knowledge to contribute to this area.

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